THE GUIDHERTS OF MOAT BRAE

WALTER S. LOCKHART

Ray
with her Godmother's
love

mas 1925.

THE GUIDHERTS OF MOAT BRAE

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BEING

SOME OLD-TIME ECHOES
OF A LOWLAND TOWN

BY

WALTER S. LOCKHART

AUTHOR OF
"A SOLDIER'S SANCTUARY AND OTHER POEMS"

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TO

ALFRED WOOD

MY FRIEND OF MANY YEARS

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Chapter I
A BACKWARD GLANCE

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A BACKWARD GLANCE

It is noteworthy that the mental impressions engendered by the keen observation and varied activities of impetuous youth, after having been partially obliterated in the stress and self-sufficiency of lusty manhood, are apt to recur to the mind with renewed intensity during the declining years of one's life. There is a touch of pathos in the thought, for just as those youthful impressions were, in the main, of a pleasurable nature or the reverse, so will the retrospections of middle-age assume a tinge of joyousness or melancholy.

As I sit and give myself up to a review of my own boyhood now that I have reached the retrospective period, I am happy to find that my ruminations are in a high degree pleasant and exhilarating, consequently it is borne in upon me more and more clearly that my youth was full of brightness, with joy for my daily companion—care little more than a name.

Not but that I must have encountered trouble in those distant days, seeing that no living creature escapes it wholly at any stage of existence ; but in my case so lightly did it fall as to be quickly swallowed up in the swelling tide of a young heart's happiness.

Let me think. The day before I said good-bye to my school life was black with misery, and that and the days which immediately followed constituted the only period of excessive grief I remember in my teens.

During my two years attendance at the Academy at Dinnan, in the south of Scotland, I, being Lancashire born, had made few friends, for, besides the shy nature that held me aloof from the livelier spirits, there was in me at that time a singular aversion to the Scottish mode of speech, which I never acquired with the glib imitativeness that characterized the other half-dozen lads from " South the Tweed," who gained their knowledge under the learned Rector and his assistants.

But I had one favourite companion, a delicate, gentle-hearted youth about my own age, between whom and myself a bond of affection existed so strong and deep that, had he lived, it would have existed strong and deep to-day. Poor Archie Drummond ! I see him at this moment as vividly as when he

approached me for the last time in the playground, with his free, open manner, and, leaning on my shoulder, his head turned and lowered so as to bring his eyes in line with mine, begged me to accompany him to the river for a stroll, possibly a bathe.

" Say you'll go, Tom, and I'll meet you at the Cross at six sharp. Ye ken to-morrow's our last day together, for when you go back to Lancashire you'll just be lost to me."

" I'll go, Archie," said I, and he went away radiantly happy.

But we did not meet that evening nor ever again. I was sitting at tea with Janet Guidhert in the cosy kitchen of Moat Brae Cottage, just as I had done from day to day for months past, and, the meal being well advanced, according to custom John Guidhert arrived home from the Nursery, big with a single item of news.

A man of few words, precise and to the point, John always delivered himself of his " item " the moment he had removed his horny but slightly trembling hand from his reverently-bent forehead, and while his spoon was slowly describing circles at the bottom of his teacup.

" Ill news the nicht, gudewife ; ill news the nicht," he exclaimed with a sigh and a mournful shake of his head.

"Say ye sae? Od, what is't?" returned the old woman, straightening herself with a look of enquiry.

"The toon's the puirer o' a likely lookin' bit laddie within this hauf-hour, for as I was comin' doon the High Street sic a ane cam' steerin' oot o' Bauldy's Close no' heedin' whare he was gaun, and he juist ran aneath the wheels o' the Baker's van, an' they pickit him up deid. They hadna fan' oot whase wean he was whan I cam' awa, but he lookit gey like a 'Cademy lad."

"Puir bairn, puir bairn," tremulously mur mured Mrs. Guidhert, her eyes glistening.

My own eyes rained tears afterwards, for it was Archie Drummond, and that poor boy's sudden call was the one great grief of my early days.

But besides this tragic incident that affected me so deeply, there were other happenings of more or less interest to me, in which, however, the worthy couple under whose roof I dwelt during my stay at Dinnan were more closely concerned than I was myself; and these I shall endeavour to portray simply and truthfully in the following pages.

Chapter II

MOAT BRAE COTTAGE

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MOAT BRAE COTTAGE

Than Moat Brae Cottage (or Moat Brae, as it was generally called), there was no pleasanter spot in our little town, and if I set myself to picture it, as seems only right and proper for the reason that life under its humble roof is to form the main theme of my narrative, you may be well assured that it will be with the bias of a partial fancy ; although, I opine, my description, even at that, will be but a poor reflex of the reality.

It stood at the head of the Brae, and, facing southwards, afforded over its own fair garden and the intervening Nursery running along the hollow at the bottom of the Brae an open view of the main portion of the town, with here the Town Hall tower and yonder the Kirk steeple, situated, the latter at the head, the former at the foot of the High Street, whose somewhat sinuous course could be easily traced by the moderately tall buildings running along either side of its wide expanse.

The garden, standing square and perfectly level in front of the Cottage at the height of its windows, which looked out upon a path wide enough to admit the only vehicle that ever entered it—the farmer's peat cart—overlooked the Nursery, so that John, while pacing along his garden's farthest bound, only needed to glance over the low thorn hedge to command the scene of his daily labours, and occasionally during his dinner-hour to take note of the pranks of some of the younger workers, who being in the habit of watching for his serious face above the hedge always moderated their lively sallies as soon as it appeared.

At the corner of the garden nearest to the Brae a thickly grown bourtree-bush formed a natural arbour which overlooked the neatly laid out and well-kept flower beds, and beyond them the flourishing vegetable patches interspersed with numerous fruit trees.

On the opposite side of the Brae ran the high wall of the Moat House grounds with their stately trees—elm and ash and sycamore, whose great branches swayed in green luxuriance above the Brae and threw their quivering shadows on the Cottage gable with its single eye-like window.

The Cottage was but small, there being only a "but" and a "ben" with a little room

situated behind the "hallan," or lobby, and entered from the kitchen; yet it was by no means unattractive, having its front wall covered with creeping plants and rose trees growing above the door.

Ours was by no means the only house at the head of the Brae. There straggled beyond it a row of some twenty cottages when I knew the place, and the first of these stood end on to the rear of Moat Brae, which had the appearance of having turned its back upon them all, as being quite beneath its dignity, mean as that was by comparison with other dwelling-houses not very far away.

Not that this was Janet Guidhert's view, for that good woman often remarked upon the absurdity of erecting a house with its gable to the road, as ours was; and as she had heard of certain wonderful achievements in the way of the bodily removal of buildings, she was wont to speculate upon the grand improvement it would be if our Cottage were "lifted cannily up, turned roun' and set weel back in its ain gairden, facin' braewards," in which position, she said, it would look "far mair wise-like." To which John would retort in his quiet way that folks in general sought out houses that stood to their liking, and that if we could not thole ours we must just flit.

But if Janet occasionally aired this opinion

of hers in a half-playful, half-serious fashion, it must not be inferred that she regarded her humble abode with anything less than a whole-hearted affection. No, it was the dearest spot on earth to her—a place thrice-hallowed by the memories of many years, some sweet, some very, very bitter.

The trials of life come to all, and there are lessons learned in its hard school that are heart-corroding; but Janet Guidhert had been affected but little, if at all, adversely by the ups and downs of her long and honourable wifehood, during the course of which care and pain and death even had paid many a visit to her lowly roof-tree. And whether the rain dropped upon that patch of garden ground, or whether the sunshine disported itself there, or the keen frosts of winter whitened it, there was no diminution of her affection for her home of many years.

It was the abode of peace, too, perhaps as markedly as any other spot in Dinnan, a very haven of rest to whosoever had the good fortune to sojourn within its gates. Of a certainty the influence of the place is on me now as memory recalls its old-time features.

Surely life was never lived more equably than at Moat Brae. An abiding calm pervaded it, which gave me the impression of a perpetual Sabbath. Not that there was any

suspicion of dulness in or about the dwelling, for Janet was a woman of an active mind—her ready smile was sunshine, her laugh was something good to hear, and although years of labour had bent her form considerably she yet retained a bloom upon her cheek and a fire in her eye which might well have provoked the envy of many a languid dame of high degree.

It will be readily understood from my description what good ground I have for the assertion here feelingly made that the pleasing aspect of the place and the many excellent qualities inherent in its true-hearted mistress, combined to create an atmosphere for our home-life, humble though it might be, which was very charming and attractive.

Chapter III
A PUBLIC BENEFACTOR

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A PUBLIC BENEFACTOR

It has been asserted that every village in broad Scotland has its born " natural," and it may be so ; although (so erratic are the actions of some men) it is not always wise to conclude that you have placed your finger on the right poor creature, when you find him the butt and plaything of the thoughtless ones upon the public street.

Nay, the chances are that your assumption will be woefully beside the mark, and that in the matter of brains the poor clown shall give the go-by to others, who it may be sit in high places and seem to figure largely in the public estimation.

But that is neither here nor there.

Our little town of Dinnan thought it had its " natural " in one Willie Blair, otherwise " Whusslin Wullie," a big, broad shouldered, lad-like man of thirty or thereabouts, whose great failing it was to obey orders in season and out of season. For, be it observed, there

are occasions when blind attention to the mandates of others simply amounts to a breach of trust.

At the time of which I write, the volunteer movement had caught the public fancy, and, of course, Dinnan had its contingent, who filled up their spare time in the orthodox fashion, accepting as best they might the sneers and jeers of that section of the community who regarded the whole business as a sham, and its votaries as guys and asses.

We have quickly come to learn in these troublous days the true value of our Citizen Soldiers, and our scorn of them is assuredly a thing of the past.

Well, Willie Blair had become imbued with the martial spirit, and what so sure as that the lads of the town should seek to make capital out of the circumstance.

In the early stage of his trouble it was only at a Saturday parade or march out that Willie was seriously affected; the sharp words of command, the clatter of rifles and the measured tread of heavily-booted feet, seeming to turn the poor brain that had been always more or less flighty.

Placing himself at the rear of the Company, Willie would stand stock still until the march began. As soon as the men set out their devoted attendant would follow in stately

enough fashion, except that periodically on finding himself out of step he would execute the most grotesque antics to get in again, assisting himself at each attempt by facial contortions and tongue twists pitiable to see.

As may be supposed, all this was "nuts" to the youngsters, who took to drilling the poor fellow on their own account; and before long he was to be seen any day marching through the town in a perfect fever of excitement, his tormentors running at his heels noisy and happy.

A finishing touch was given to their rapture when in an inspired moment during one of those "forced marches," a facetious urchin yelled out "Whussle Wullie!" Blair immediately struck up "The Campbells are coming," and so, as it were, sealed his fate, for from that day the command was never omitted and Willie never failed to obey it.

Thus it came about that legitimate and profitable work suited to his capacity, such as holding a horse's head at an Inn door, the delivery of a parcel, or the posting of a letter was neglected or thrown up at a moment's notice; the words "Whussle Wullie," by whomsoever uttered, being quite sufficient to set him off along the street on an aimless tramp to the tune of "The Campbells are coming."

But a day came when the tables were turned, and it happened in this wise.

I was out walking with John Guidhert one still July afternoon when suddenly a distant murmur arose, which, gradually growing in volume, announced the near approach of Willie Blair and a contingent of his tormentors.

He came on rapidly and, rounding a street corner, took the road across the river leading countrywards and was shortly lost to sight among the trees.

John stood the whole time regarding the scene in grim silence, but showing on his countenance unmistakable signs of displeasure.

"The raskills!" he exclaimed. "Isna that fair deevilish?

"Man, I hae hauf an idea.

"Fetch that Blair up the Brae in the fore-nicht, gin ye can fin' him, an' I'll try an' knock some bluidthirsty notions intil that crackit heid o' his.

"Sirse, he's big eneuch to fecht his ain battles, but I jalouse he disna ken richt hoo, the muckle softy."

Needless to say I was deeply interested. Willie was promptly found and as promptly placed under a verbal shower-bath on the floor of Moat Brae kitchen.

Quoth John, "What dae ye mean, ye fuilish fallow, lattin' thae blackguards o' lads twirl ye roun' their fingers thon gate?

"What dae ye mean ava? Man, I wad think shame," and so on, and so on.

"Ay, ay, Maister Guidhert," returned Willie with a giggle, "but d'ye no see?

"I maun obey my orders. I mairch an' whussle an' whussle an' mairch an' isna that fine?"

"Oh, that's a' verra weel; but, Wullie, wha ever saw a man mairchin' an' whusslin' without playin' on a drum? It's redeec'lous. Ye maun hae a drum, Wullie. Wadna that juist cow a', my boy?"

"Eh, Maister Guidhert, ye've hit it!" and the poor oaf laughed aloud and stamped his feet in childish glee.

"I thocht *that* wad fit ye," said John, smiling.

"Noo, I canna fin' ye a drum, Wullie, no a' at aince, but here's your drumstick," and John drew from behind him that terror to all schoolboys—a stout cane.

This instrument of torture was something less than a yard in length and had a loop of cord firmly secured at one end intended to encircle the wrist of the executioner, so as to prevent the cane being wrenched from his grasp.

"Noo, my hearty, what are ye to dae for a

drum ? Lat me see. Oh, I ken ; here, man, whisper. Ye'll juist grab the first laddie ye can lay your hauns' on (but a plump ane for preference), turn up his hurdies in front o' ye, and—there ye are !

" Oor, laddie, here'll lat me show ye the richt poseetion."

I blush to own it, but I was only a boy then and I suffered the indignity.

" Eh, Maister Guidhert, that's graun', that's graun' ! " screamed Willie with a laugh that had something of a wail in it.

" Imphm ! I'll dae't ! "

And he did too. Shortly after this memorable interview, in addition to the shrill note of Willie's fife (to put it figuratively) was heard the shriller squeal of the pipes ; and as Willie took to changing his " drum " as many as half-a-dozen times during a single march-out—well, there was soon a singular scarcity of drums !

As a matter of fact, the poor man's occupation was gone, much to his own relief and to that of many a feeling heart in Dinnan.

And thus, of a surety, not only was a galling incubus lifted from poor Willie Blair's unbalanced mind, but John himself, without any design on his part, but simply by allowing free play to the pure humanity in his noble nature, became a public benefactor.

Chapter IV
BRUTE LECKY

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BRUTE LECKY

The motive underlying impulsive action is often hard to penetrate, but in the case of John Guidhert when he flung Wat Lecky, the Wabster, into the river it was transparency itself.

Although endowed by nature with a feeling heart if ever man was, John had also that not uncommon accompaniment of tenderness—a headstrong temper, which, while kept well under control in ordinary circumstances, never failed to run away with him at sight of oppression, vile wickedness or cruelty.

Woe betide the unlucky wight whom he might chance to discover in any flagrantly wrongful act, for at such a moment he knew not how to spare, but just meted out punishment in the way that seemed good to him.

So the Wabster found to his cost, as will presently appear.

It was on a certain pleasant Saturday afternoon in the midst of the week-end quietude following upon the departure of the Nursery workers and the temporary cessation of echoing footfalls on the Brae that John, having shaved and tidied himself with his customary care (when so treated Dinnan could show no more dignified figure), put to

me the familiar enquiry, "Are ye comin', laddie?" and set off down the Brae for a quiet stroll along the near bank of the river, which afforded for several miles up-stream a most delightful, if little frequented, promenade.

It is a peculiarity of Dinnan water that after flowing through less important places, it disdains acquaintance with Dinnan itself, except in a shy and casual way.

Upon emerging from the comparative seclusion of steep and thickly-wooded banks, alternating with charming woodland glades, where its own merry music, mingling not inharmoniously with the varied notes of innumerable birds, turns the sylvan scene into a kind of noisy paradise, the river makes one grand semi-circular sweep Dinnan-wards around the outer edge of an extensive holm lying low at the side of the town; lingers in eddying pools about the solid foundations of certain favoured houses in the neighbourhood of the stately bridge, from the parapets of which enthusiastic anglers are afforded an opportunity of observing superb specimens of the salmon tribe lying securely enough in the pellucid depths; and then, as though impatient of such profitless detention, escapes noisily over a broad weir and straightway gathers force for its last run of little more than a mile to the sea.

From Moat Brae Cottage, Dinnan Water is reached by turning to the right at the foot of the Brae and skirting the boundary wall of the Moat House grounds, which runs with a sharp curve almost to the river's brink, where a gate is placed, which in the old days could rarely have been closed during the hours of light, seeing that numbers of the townsfolk paid daily visits to the spot for water, their jangling hoops and cans familiarizing the ear with sounds more harsh than harmonious.

For, be it noted, this was long before the town's parliament entered upon its protracted consideration of the great Gravitation Scheme for supplying the town with water—a scheme which, notwithstanding its feasibility and manifest advantages, caused many heartburnings and a great deal of dissension, both inside and outside the Council Chamber, before being finally adopted.

So intense, indeed, was the feeling displayed that on one regrettable occasion when the tide of opposition was running strong among the Councillors, a dire threat was actually forced from the good-natured and habitually tranquil-minded Bailie Lambie, chief champion of gravitation.

" Gin the watter was on i' the toon enow," he yelled, striking the table a mighty blow with his clenched fist, " I wad hae in the hose

an' droon oot every mither's son o' ye—I wad, by George ! "

But enough of digression. On the particular afternoon referred to John and I set out together in high spirits, promising ourselves nothing but enjoyment.

Unfortunately, however,

" The best laid schemes o' mice and men
Gang aft agley,"

and, as a matter of fact, our walk was interrupted almost at its commencement in a most unpleasant manner.

We had passed the riverside gate and were just beginning to feast our eyes on the beautiful scene opening out before us, when with startling suddenness a woman's piercing scream rang out, and, wheeling round, we saw Brute Lecky, drunk and infuriated, in the act of dragging his wife through the doorway of their cottage by the hair of her head !

This appalling spectacle turned John Guidhert into a maniac. His eyes flashed, his lips tightened, and drawing a clenched right hand from his pocket he exclaimed in a voice hoarse with emotion,

" Man, man, a sicht like that mak's life no worth leevin' ! " and made for the brute with rapid strides.

In less time than it takes to record, he had seized Lecky by the throat and waistband,

lifted him high, and, without a moment's hesitation, dropped him over a low wall into a fork of the river which shot out at that point convenient to his hand.

"Noo, Lecky, ye raskill, say yer prayers there!

" Droonin's ower guid for the man 'at wad treat a puir, wake woman so."

He then continued his walk, merely pausing to watch the discomfited Wabster creep up on to the road amid the jeers and guffaws of his gathering neighbours, who had not one particle of pity to bestow upon him.

Nay, so nicely did John's action accord with the popular feeling that numerous exclamations of approval were shouted after him, chiefly, be it said, by the female portion of the assemblage.

At the tea-table later, John said grace, and having got his spoon going somewhat more rapidly than usual he suddenly startled Mrs. Guidhert by coolly remarking,

" I flung Lecky intil the watter a while back, Janet. He was thrashin' the wife."

" Gudesake, John," she exclaimed, clasping her hands, " ye'll get yersel intil trouble yet wi' that awfu' temper o' yours. Mark my words."

But John maintained that, trouble or no trouble, he should just do the same again if necessary.

The trouble came soon enough, for the meal was still in progress when the well-known blue uniform shot past the window and Beattie, the burly town constable, stood on the kitchen floor.

"Guidhert, my man, I hae ye cornered this time," said he, with something of a smile playing over his ruddy visage.

"Lecky's ta'en oot a summons an' it'll mean transportation nae doot."

"Aweel, Beattie," returned John quite unconcernedly, as he ran an eye round the inner circumference of his egg, "transportation or hangin', the coward gat nae mair than he deserved, an' wull I no lat the Bailie ken that on Monday mornin'!"

Monday morning came, and John was true to his word.

Indeed, so vigorously did he make his statement before the Provost (no less) that that dignitary cut the matter short by remarking,

"That'll dae, Guidhert; the case is dismissed.

"Beattie, keep you an e'e on this Lecky.

"I warn him (an' he hears me) that gin he comes here again after abusin' that puir wife o' his, we'll fin' him a lodgin' an wark to dae forbye."

So John scored after all.

Chapter V
"TWITTERY" MARSHALL

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"TWITTERY" MARSHALL

Not the least entertaining among the frequent callers at Moat Brae was an ancient personage named Timothy Marshall, who, although bent with age and the victim of an inveterate rheumatism, made shift to creep up to our place at short intervals, always with a freshly replenished budget of news and local gossip, which he would proceed to retail with the greatest gusto and, as I thought, an exasperating fondness for the veriest trivialities.

Garrulity, indeed, was the chief characteristic of this singular individual, and being comfortably off and able to write against his name in official documents that required it the magic words, "No Occupation," he spent his time in "danderin' roun'," on the look out for an auditory so far tolerant as to give him a patient hearing.

His tongue was always going, and as his voice was thin and sharp but insistent like the note of a sparrow, he came to be known as

" Twittery," and was so invariably greeted by his friends and acquaintances, to all appearance, without any trace of disapproval or resentment on his part.

Many a time have I listened to his " uncos " from my retirement in the room while I was going over my school lessons ; and in spite of the fact that his conversations never failed to interfere considerably with the current of my thoughts, rendering the work I had in hand—whatever it might be—more difficult of accomplishment, I could never bring myself to shut out " Twittery " by closing the two doors between him and me ; nay, I have even found myself moving noiselessly across the floor and opening the doors wider so as to hear him the better.

A favourite anecdote of his—heard by me in these circumstances—amused me a good deal at the time, and also excited the risibilities of his more immediate auditors in the kitchen.

It concerned the name and fame of one Robert Tait, an eccentric farmer, long dead, whose land adjoined the river close to the town, and who, as a near neighbour, was well known to most of the inhabitants.

On the particular occasion I have in mind " Twittery," having worked his way through the usual preliminary small-talk on general

matters, including the state of the weather and its effect upon his rheumatism (a perennial topic); animadversions on the dilatoriness of the rain needed to save the crops; the accident to the Auld-Kirk Bell; the startling intelligence that the Town's Horse was on the sick list; the enormity of the Widow MacFlichty "takin' anither man, the silly auld fule, at her time o' life, an wi' sax weans at her fireside a'ready"—having, I say, to use a figure of speech, waded through this prearranged collection of up-to-date but trivial news items, "Twittery" forthwith got into deeper water, and triumphantly launched his *pièce de résistance*, which, as I have said, really afforded me some amusement.

"Oh, Guidhert," he began, "ye'll hae heard that story aboot auld Rabbie Tait o' the 'Bangin' Yett,' an' the 'luny' he brocht in to the Dinnan Poliss-office, langsyne?"

No, neither John nor Janet had any present knowledge of the incident.

"Weel, ye ken," piped "Twittery."

"Rabbie was oot drivin' in the gig ae day, an' as he was comin' cannily alang the hie road for hame, keekin' ower the hedges at the craps an' cattle, he gat a gliff o' a wee man wi' lang hair, in his shirt sleeves, ahint a hay stack, stampin' roun' an' roun' an' flingin' his airms aboot in sic a daft-like way 'at Rabbie

naiturally cam' to the conclusion 'at he was some puir lunatic wha'd escapit frae the County Asylum.

" What was to be dune ?

" Rabbie was naethin' if no a man o' resource in face o' deeficulties, an' jalousin' 'at he saw afore him ane wha was a rale danger, baith to himsel' an' the haill countryside, he deceeded to nab the cratur, intil the gig wi' him, an' rin him doon wi' a' speed to the Dinnan Poliss-station.

" It was a big idea, an' like a' big ideas, it wasna that easy to cairry 't oot ; but, convinced o' the need for prompt action, Rabbie had nae qualms ava, an' set himsel' to his task.

" Stappin' quately doon frae the gig, he ower the dyke, creepit roun' the stack, an' rushin' in whan the ' luny's ' back was turned, he gruppit him roun' the waist as he was ravin' at the loudest, whummlet him doon onto his face, an' teed his hauns thegither ahint his back wi' a big pocket-naipkin.

" Losh ! gin the man wasna daft afore he was daft eneuch noo, an' he fair raised blue murder. An' the language ! Ouf, man, it was somethin' awfu ' ! He beggit an' he prayed ; he screeched an' he swore ; an' dae a' he could think o' Rabbie couldna pacifee him. He even went the length o' offerin'

him a dram oot o' his pocket-flask, for, as Rabbie said, the cratur's reid neb lookit as if it had aften smelt whusky.

" But it was a' o' nae use, sae Rabbie juist trottit the puir dementit wee fallow onto the road, tummled him intil the gig, splutterin' like a wull-cat, an' galloped aff wi' him the twa miles to the toon, never aince drawin' rein till he pu'ed up at the poliss-office door.

" In a jiffy the fowk were bizzin' roun' the machine like bees in a byke, an' there was the awfullest commotion as the constable an' Rabbie lifted the man doon an' cairrit him intil the jile.

" Af coorse, naebody had the sma'est notion what the man had dune to get himsel' intil sic a pingle, sae they juist set aboot imaginin' a' the crimes in the calendar an' fixin' them on the unfortunate chap, an' it wasna mony meenutes afore it was roun' the toon 'at the poliss had the biggest raskill unhung in the lock-up.

" An' what think ye was the sum-tottle o' 't a' ?

" Far frae being a lunatic, the man was juist ane o' the English play-actors 'at was performin' at the Institute that week, an' wha had fixed on a quate spot ayont the toon to gang ower his pairt, an' get it intil the heid o' him, till Rabbie pits in his spoke an' spoils a'.

"I needna tell ye 'at Rabbie was awfu' dropt on i' the hinneren', but he mainteened 'at gin a body wanted to cairry oot that sort o' tamfoolery in the open without being nabbit, the only safe plan wad be to clim' to the tap o' a mountain, an' a guid hie ane at that.

"The ream o' the joke was 'at the Inspector made oot 'at Rabbie was the dafty an' no the ither fallow, an' he said he was in twa minds whether or no to lock *him* up as a wandering lunatic. Imphm!"

After this flight "Twittery" rose to go, and I closed my room door, but not before I heard him remark with unction,

"Guid day, freens! I'll be back sune wi' a' the news I can gether, for, dod, ye're baith champion listeners an' its a rale pleesure to talk t'ye."

Chapter VI
A PALTRY FIND

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A PALTRY FIND

Although anything but a dullard, the master of Moat Brae was no bookworm ; and if we except the Bible, one or two standard works on Gardening, and the " Dinnan Advertiser," it was but seldom that he went outside the confines of his own mind in search of mental stimulants.

True, a copy of " The Ghostseer," by Schiller, had lain in my room ever since I came to Moat Brae, left by a grandson, a rising young artist, whom the worthy couple had reared from early childhood, and who was then pursuing his studies in Spain, but John never dreamed of opening such a book as that. He did not believe in ghosts, and there was an end of it. There was, besides, an edition of Wilson's " Tales of the Borders," in two large volumes, which lay in a recess in

the wall behind Janet's easy chair. These, however, were never disturbed for reading purposes, John declaring that "they were ower hard to get at, an' ower fashous to hawnle whan ane had gotten at them."

But there was at least one occasion that I recall, not without amusement, when both John and Janet evinced the liveliest interest in a literary production, the intrinsic merits of which I do not feel called upon to appraise.

It was while we were seated together one evening, a quiet but happy trio, that John, taking the lapel of his sleeved-waistcoat in one hand, and glancing downwards with a puckering of the lips which always denoted serious intent, drew forth a formidable looking envelope, remarking,

"I faund this in the hame-comin'. Tammas, my lad, open't up an' see what's in't."

The envelope (which, by the way, was addressed to the Editor of the "Dinnan Advertiser") being unsealed, I at once complied, and there came to light a large sheet of whitey-brown paper, coarse but clean, upon which was written a string of verses entitled, "Oor Hoose-En."

At the first glance this appeared to be just about as uninteresting a document as could have found its way into our little house-

hold; but queer things happen at times.

"A screed o' verses, say ye," ejaculated John contemptuously, on my announcing the fact.

"Aweel, naebody'll be muckle the waur o' the loss o' them, a'm thinkin'.

"But we'll hae them ower for a' that, sae bang awa, Tammas."

Thus enjoined, I cleared my throat and began, not without some misgiving as to the degree of success that was likely to attend this unexpected opportunity of airing my Doric:

"Oor Hoose-En'."

"There's mony ways o' daein' in life,
To ding auld Daddie Care;
Ane fechts his lane, ane tak's a wife,
Some rin for't here and there.
Your man o' walth flees roun' the warl',
Wi' flunkies nine or ten;
But me—I juist hau'd up the barr'l
At oor hoose-en'.

"Oor hoose-en', oor hoose-en',
Ye'll say I'm fair romancin',
But it's truth, d'ye ken.
This mony a day I've gathered there,
Sic lear's I'll get nae ither whare;
We've shade and sun, we've dool and fun,
At oor hoose-en'."

At this point came a vigorous protest from Janet.

" Did ever onybody hear the like o' that for fair, evendoon nonsense ?

" I'm no clever, but I hae an opeenion as weel as the lave, an' I'se uphaud 'at it's aboot the warst thing ane can dae to hing aboot hoose corners, catchin' cauld an' bringin' on hoasts [coughs] an' I kenna what a'.

" An' to think o' the stupit body, whaever he is, wearin' oot his bits o' claes wi' rubbin' up again' an auld watter cask frae month's en' to month's en' !

" Dod, there's surely naebody in this toon sae far awa wi't as to dae ony sic daft-like thing as that ! "

" Janet woman," said John, " ye can tak this frae me—thae poets is clean daft, to a man ; sae there's little to wonner at in ocht we've heard sae far.

" Weel, laddie, ca' awa if there's ony mair o't."

" Ye'll think it's but an ordinar place ?
My fegs ! that's whare ye're wrang ;
And gin I couldna prove my case,
I wadna sing my sang.
The Kirk, the Jile, the Cooncil-ha',
Whare chiels oor richts defen',
A view like that it gars ane blaw,
At oor hoose-en'.

" Oor hoose-en', oor hoose-en',
Come ane an' a' to prove it ;
Dod, I carena when.
The steeple wi' its airn tongue
That lookit auld when I was young,
It's worth a fee juist that to see
Frae oor hoose-en'."

" Imphm," said John, knitting his brows and running his horny fingers along the edge of the table, as though seeking inspiration there. " Wha's the mannie 'at gets sic a view as that in oor toon a' for naething ?

" There's the Kirk, an' the Jile, an' the Cooncil-ha' richt eneuch ; but wha in the warl's gaun to get a sicht o' the three o' them a' at aince withoot mairchin' ae e'e doon a side street, while the ither ane glowers alang the main causeway ? "

It may be observed here, although perhaps sufficiently obvious, that the thoughts of the old folks were so entirely centred in their " ain toon " that it never occurred to either of them that the author of the " screed," when composing it, might have had in his eye a place a hundred miles from Dinnan.

With the idea of helping matters forward, I quoted from the Bard of Avon :

" The poet's eye in a fine frenzy rolling,
Doth glance from heaven to earth,
from earth to heaven,"

and suggested that in all probability poets were gifted with a nicer optical discernment and a more extended range of vision than ordinary mortals; to which John replied testily,

"Havers! Man, Tammas, ye micht talk sense."

Somewhat abashed by this rebuke, I refrained from further comment and proceeded:

"A single bricht wee e'e o'glass
Peeps oot upon the green,
Whare oor toun-wordies, as they pass,
Ye'll see and no be seen.
Sae, when the wather's ocht like dour,
I tak' my cutty ben,
And watch the birkies frae my boo'r
At oor hoose-en'.

"Oor hoose-en', oor hoose-en',
It mak's a richt wee spy-hole too
For my auld hen.
Whare, aiblins, gin her temper's hie,
She'll gar the bonnie bairnies flee,
Wi' a' their noise, their taps and toys,
Frae oor hoose-en'."

"Losh! It'll be auld Jawcob Rule, the mason," ventured Janet, with a knowing look over the top of her spectacles, as she

smoothed down the stocking she was knitting on her knee.

" He has a barr'l at the en' o' his hoose yonner, on the High Street, an' a wee winda forbye, gin a'm no mista'en.

" Ay, an' noo I think o't, I've seen him mair than aince, wi' my ain een, haudin' up the barr'l michty hard wi' his back, but it was whan he was fou, puir man."

" But, Janet, that's nonsense ye're talkin', onywey," said John frowning. " Ye ken weel eneuch 'at Jawcob's Mysie wad never staun' ragin' at onybody frae *her* room winda !

" Thon woman's ower little speerit to shoo a flee oot o' the hoose.

" Jawcob knockit a' that oot o' the puir body langsyne, the drucken wastrel.

" An' juist answer me this ane, gudewife," added John in a sarcastic tone and smiling grimly,

" Is auld Jawcob Rule a poet ? "

" Ye're mebbe richt," said Janet quietly, and, changing her needles she went on with her knitting, evidently tired of profitless speculation.

With some show of impatience John now urged me to push on and see if there was " ony sense in the thing ava."

I am bound to confess that, being by this time heartily tired of my task I hesitated ;

but as John again said "gang on, man," in such a tone as to lead me to think that, although sick of the business himself, curiosity urged him to see it through, I yawned, stretched myself and continued:

"When Janet was a thochtless lass,
She fancied aye a jo;
Her mither gied her nocht but sauce,
And raged baith hie and low.
Ae nicht, a laddie frae the Manse
Rapt on the winnock-pen,
She lows'd her tongue and gar't him dance
At oor hoose-en'.

"'Oor hoose-en'! *oor* hoose-en'!
Ye'll no get courtin' here, ye loun!—
The deil's in Jen!'
Hau'd in, quoth I, he's weel eneuch;
But swish, some nameless clartie stuff,
She coupit oot, richt ower his snoot,
At oor hoose-en'."

"My certie! Wasna that a blackburnin' shame," exclaimed Janet, her interest suddenly reviving.

"To think o' that gude-for-naethin' randie ca'in the lad sic names, an' sendin' him hame like a drookit craw!

"Oor Minister wad hae naebody aboot the

Manse 'at hadna the very best o' characters ; an' nae doot the lad was honest eneuch, ay, an' every bit as guid as the woman's hizzie, whaever she may be."

"Haud there noo, guidwife, ye're juist haverin," said John, putting up his hand warningly.

"The Minister's fowk's no a' angels, I can tell ye ; in fact, to my certain knowledge, it tak's him a' his time to keep some o' them in order.

"A'm no blamin' the woman for giein' the chiel the length o' her tongue—he mebbe deserved it ; but she didna need to hauf-droon him forbye. Tammas, my man, haud even on at yer readin', an' lat there be less talkin'. We've haen far ower mony interruptions frae the guidwife ever sin' ye stairted, an' gif we dinna mind we're gaun to be sittin' here till anither day daws."

"Weel, of a' the——" began Janet, staring across at her shameless husband.

"Verse five," I ejaculated, and stifling a yawn, I forged ahead :

"'As market days are wearing late,'
The farmers tak' the road ;
Ane, rattlin' by me like a spate
Gies ay the tither nod.
He gets his fill, it's plain to see,
In some dram-drinkin' den,

Or gosh ! he wadna mak' sae free
At oor hoose-en'.

"Oor hoose-en', oor hoose-en',
Ay, sirs, I'm aften notic't,
By the foremost men.
' Weel, Tammie lad, ye're leevin' yet ? '
' Juist that,' says I, ' and, fair or wet,
As lang's I'm fier, ye'll fin' me here,
At oor hoose-en'.' "

Here came an interruption from John—not Janet ; she, poor woman, was nodding over her needles.

" Weel, weel, the like o' that. I wadna wonner but ye'll want to ken wha I think it is 'at gangs rattlin' doon the street lip-fou ilka market day, cockin' his beaver at ony auld body he sees hingin' aboot the hoose corners. But catch me ! Na, na, faith, no me.

" Mind ye, I could pit my finger on the chiel easy eneuch ; in fac', his name's at my tongue tip, but I'se no lat it oot for a' that.

" I aince gat mysel' a rale guid horse-whuppin' for lattin' my tongue rin lowse a wee, an' I'se no risk it a second time."

" Sensible man ! " murmured Janet, who had pricked up her ears again at the sound of his voice.

Both my auditors were now showing unmistakable signs of extreme weariness.

Janet's needles had slipped from her fingers, which rested limply in her lap; and as for John, putting his hand up to his mouth, he yawned outright, and exclaimed in sleepy tones,

"Man, it's awfu' wersh [insipid] stuff that. Are ye aboot through?"

Glancing at the sheet, I announced that there were still four verses to read, whereupon John groaned aloud.

These, however, I managed to polish off at the double, for I had no further interruptions (except that once about midway I was startled for a moment by a loud snore, merging in a still louder gasp); and when at the conclusion of my reading I looked up for the final verdict, I found both the critics sound asleep, and happily oblivious of poets and poetry, good, bad or indifferent.

Singular to say, John never thereafter mentioned that evening's occupation, nor the document that occasioned it; and, indeed, I suspected that he took blame to himself for bringing home what he, at least, certainly regarded as a paltry find.

For my part, as a sort of set off against our questionable action in prying into what was really no concern of ours, I carefully sealed

the envelope, affixed the necessary stamp at my own expense, and dropped the missive into the letter-box next morning on my way to the Academy.

I may add that for some weeks afterwards I closely scrutinized the "Poets' Corner" in the "Dinnan Advertiser" on the chance of seeing "Oor Hoose-En'," but it never appeared; and I was led to conclude that, like many another toiler on the lower slopes of the Hill of Parnassus, the author was doomed to failure and disappointment.

Chapter VII
THEATRICALS AND CENSURE

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THEATRICALS AND CENSURE

I HAVE very good reason to remember the only occasion when any semblance of strife or discord disturbed the serenity of our home life; for, alas! I myself was the delinquent.

I have indicated elsewhere that John Guidhert was a rigid disciplinarian, and it is to be feared that his extreme strictness (the outcome, I suppose, of that native dourness which is said to be a prominent trait in the Scottish character) was apt to lead him at times to pay less regard to the dictates of justice than was either seemly or fair.

The trouble arose two or three days after the arrival in our midst of a Company of strolling players under the direction of a Manager of an energetic turn, who, after dragging his disheartened troupe through a succession of sparsely peopled hamlets with insignificant results, was bent upon making

a great bid for success in our stirring little town.

This individual's principal concern, as I was sharp enough to gather during their stay, was to infuse some portion of his own tireless energy into as doleful a set of scarecrows as ever trod the boards of a theatre.

Bear in mind this was long ago. I would not for one moment suggest that such a disreputable-looking collection of bedraggled Thespians could be found in these days of glorious " turns," brilliant revues and super-cinema Companies !

Although the harassed Manager found it a difficult enough task to make headway with the material at his disposal, he certainly laid his plans with a fair amount of shrewdness and business acumen ; and, deservedly or otherwise, was rewarded with full coffers.

Having engaged a hall, and by persistent buttonholing cajoled some members of the Town Council into extending their patronage, he turned loose his emissary to startle and intrigue the populace by drum-beating and oral announcements vigorously shouted in the public thoroughfares.

My interest was first awakened by seeing on my way home from school an odd-looking little man in uniform with a kettle drum in

front of him parading the High Street in pompous fashion.

Beating a rat-a-too from time to time he proceeded to inform the burgesses with a resounding vigour of lung that those " Stars " in the Thespian firmament——and——, supported by a galaxy of talented artists second to none in the Kingdom, would that evening present the Thrilling Drama of " Rob Roy," founded upon the Romance of the same name by the Wizard of the North, Sir Walter Scott.

He also made a point of the fact that the performance was under the distinguished patronage of the Provost, Bailies and Town Councillors of the Borough ; and added that the Volunteer Band would attend and play selections at intervals during the evening.

As I stood on the outer edge of the small crowd at one of these announcements I noticed poor Willie Blair, a pathetic figure, in the centre of a group of young children, his eyes rivetted upon the drum ; and when the little man shifted his quarters, I heard Willie talking to the youngsters as he accompanied them to the next " stance " for a repetition of the performance.

" Eh, bairns," said he. " I *wad* like to play on that man's drum ! It keeps still a' the time, an' the harder he leathers it the less it cares.

" Maister Guidhert, o' the Moat Brae, gied me a' graun' drumstick—this is it, see ! " (here he gave a fierce look and swished the cane in the air with such force as to make the children wink).

" Ay, an' he tell't me whare I wad get fine drums too !

" But I tell ye, they were awfu' fashous whan I wanted to play on them.

" An', save us, hoo they kickit !

" I hae my e'e on them yet, tho', an' gif only I could catch ane o' them—! " (Another swish with the cane).

" But, sirs, whanever they see me comin' they jouk roun' the corners an' rin as if the deil was after them ! "

The man in uniform certainly succeeded in firing my youthful fancy, and when I reached home I unburdened my mind to Janet, but with some misgiving knowing John's rooted objection to " Shows " of all kinds.

The good wife, however, was not nearly so strict in her views, and moreover she was a woman who always seemed to secure to herself a large measure of enjoyment whenever she found herself in the way of pleasing others.

But in giving her consent to my seeing the entertainment she added a serious word of warning and caution.

" For ony sake, Tammas," said she, " din-

na lat the guidman ken whare ye're gaun, an' mind an' be hame afore ten, or, my certie ! ye'll hear aboot it."

The promise was given readily enough, and I set out to what I imagined would prove to be a veritable palace of romance and enchantment.

At the foot of the Brae I met my friend Archie Drummond, and as we stood talking the strains of a stirring march, punctuated by the echo-raising beat of a big drum, reached us.

The Volunteer Band was out and at it again !

How I pitied poor Archie when he assured me that he could not possibly accompany me to the performance ! Had we known all at that moment, it is more than likely that he would have pitied me !

Turning out in full dress—a splash of colour for admiring eyes—long before its services were required at the Hall, the Band played itself to the head of the High Street and down again *twice* (it was a standing joke that whenever this happened the chemists did a roaring trade in headache powders !), and, wheeling into a side street, brought the march to a close in front of the Hall, dissolved its ranks and filed in silently.

Oh, blessed and grateful silence !

As it turned out, it would have been far better to have arranged for the Band to play in the open, for having got its second wind, as it were, it nearly blew the roof off, and appeared to nullify to a great extent the efforts of the " Stars," whose mouthings after the blare of the brass seemed to be very thin and weak.

The Band was in full blast as I entered the Hall, and, glancing at the proscenium, I wondered whether a supreme effort of the wind-instrumentalists had blown away the scenery, seeing that save for scanty curtains arranged at either side of the stage with a connecting piece at the top nothing was presented to the eye but the gaunt yellow-washed wall at the back of the building, with a single gas bracket, unlighted, sticking out in the centre and pointing towards the audience like an accusing finger.

Will it be credited that this " setting " did duty for all the scenes of the play, exterior and interior ?

I must confess that my sense of the eternal fitness of things received a severe shock when I saw the intrepid Outlaw who gave his name to the piece declaim to the bare walls as though to his native mountains ; the while " the Dougal Creature " (beside whom our " natural " would have appeared a polished

gentleman) stood in one of the " wings," and wafted across the stage in an audible whisper to the women's dressing quarters an urgent request that they would send round a needle and thread, possibly to repair his tattered kilt, which on the face of it was sadly in need of attention to render it decently presentable.

As I left the Hall at the close of the performance (for although I knew that I was transgressing I could not tear myself away sooner) the Church clock was striking ten ; and when I arrived at Moat Brae after a sharp run I found the door locked !

In response to my timid knock the key was turned, and John stood before me in rigid state, and with brows ominously bent.

" Tammas, whare hae ye been ? " he enquired austerely.

" To see ' Rob Roy.' "

" Wha's he ? I never heard o' sic a ane in this toon.

" But whaever he is he maun unnerstaun' 'at he's no to keep ye oot till this time o' nicht.

" Ye wadna like me to write hame to your faither lattin' him ken 'at ye're keepin' late hours. But mind ye, I'se dae't if ever ye stay oot sae late again.

" Ten o' the clock's my time for lockin' up,

an' I wadna change my rule for King or cadger. Mind that noo !

"Co'way intil the hoose an' gang to yer bed."

So ended this disquieting episode, and John never knew that I had been to see what was his utter abomination—a stage play.

Chapter VIII
AN IRISH INTERLUDE

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AN IRISH INTERLUDE

One stormy evening in late autumn while a high wind was bringing out weird sounds from the great trees on the opposite side of the Brae, and the rain was pattering fiercely on the window-panes, I was seated at the fireside reading when John came in breathless and looking woefully bedraggled and weather-beaten.

"I tell ye fowk," said he with a gasp "ye're on the richt side o' the wa's this nicht, for, my certie, it's a snell ane, an' it's ta'en me a' my time to win hame."

At the moment John entered, something in the book or magazine I held was exciting my risibility, and as I glanced at him I laughed outright.

"What's the maitter, Tammas? Are ye lauchin' at me?

"A'm no verra presentable, I ken, but there's naethin' to lauch at, sae far as I can see."

"No, no, Mr. Guidhert, you're mistaken. To laugh at you is what I never did, and I don't think it at all probable that I ever shall.

"I was just laughing at something I was reading about the vagaries of a certain Irish farmer and another."

"Ay, man," said John, as he towelled his ruddy face and the silvery locks about his shining forehead before taking his seat in the chimney-corner, "I wadna objec' to hear hoo thae Irish farmer chiels manage their business.

"Gif ye dinna mind, ye micht gie's a stave aboot their ongauns an' the gudewife an' me'll mebbe get a lauch oot o't as weel's yoursel'."

To please John, therefore, and as it was also to Janet's liking, I undertook to read the Irish sketch that was engaging my attention, and which was entitled:

"MALONEY'S CALF."

"Phelim Maloney, of Ballyraggit, County Galway—that large tract of country in the Wild West of Ireland where (according to the testimony of an unsuccessful man who left it to push his fortune in a foreign land) nothing is to be seen but bog, water and sky—Phelim Maloney was a small farmer, and as he had married early and worked hard under a considerate landlord, he found himself at

the age of fifty comfortably off, and able to show, in spite of the bog, as trim and well cultivated a little place of sixty acres as was to be seen anywhere.

" Phelim enjoyed the reputation of being a kindly, good-natured man ; and it is a fact that he was held up as a pattern by many an irate dame who, at the height of her anger, and by way of a clincher, would tell her unruly or dissipated spouse to ' luk at Phelim ! '

" But Phelim was no more than human, and if we were to set him down as faultless, naturally enough, our right to be considered a veracious chronicler would be at once questioned. He had *one* failing, and that was the persistent substitution of malt liquor for solid food on market days. The natural result of this bad habit was that so surely as market day came round so surely was Ballyraggit the scene of an undignified homecoming on the part of its worthy proprietor.

" Now it must not be inferred from this that the good man was ' fond of drink,' as the saying is. He could have explained (none better) that it was not from love of the liquor that he drank it, but just in the way of business : indeed, many a time did he confess to his better half—the while a splitting headache rendered him somewhat more penitent, perhaps, than he would otherwise

have been—that when once a man finds himself landed, high and dry, on the main street of a market town, where 'drouthy neibours, neibours meet' and the invitations to 'come over an' have wan' are many and pressing, there is really no resisting the temptation. We can partly see the force of this, and are therefore the readier to pass lightly over Phelim's one failing, and to refrain from writing him down a tippler.

"It was market day, and all was hurry and bustle at Ballyraggit. Phelim was no late rooster, summer or winter, but he always managed to be up himself, and to have the 'boys' (he had four of his own) out and about at an unconscionably early hour on market mornings; for there was much to be done, and he had many directions to give before taking his departure, knowing full well, poor man, that he would be unable to direct at all on his return.

"The little yellow dogcart having been run out and cleaned down, the harness burnished, and all made neat and trim, the pony was yoked and Phelim, whip in hand, and with his short 'dhudeen' in full blast, mounted into his place.

"Just as he was about to drive off, Mrs. Maloney appeared hurriedly, and looking up at her husband, 'Oh, Phelim,' said she, 'you

remimber the letter we had from cousin McGinty a week back. He'll be in the town to-day, no doubt, and if he likes to come home wid yez—why, bring him. It's little love yez have for the crathur, I know, thinkin' him proud (an' maybe he is), but there's a *raison* why yez should be frindly wid him—An' Phelim ' [this in an earnest undertone] ' for *any* sake, kape off o' the dhrink. Sure, it's more like a pig ye wor than a dacent man last market day, an' 'deed I don't like it.'

" A slight frown overspread Phelim's ruddy visage, and with the remark, ' McGinty, is it ? To the divil wid him ! ' he whipped up his pony and was gone. To say that Phelim Maloney harboured hate in his breast towards McGinty or anyone else would be beside the truth, yet we all have our likes and dislikes, and if Phelim found himself unable to make a show of appreciating his cousin's great qualities small blame to him, for assuredly there was little in the man to excite admiration. He was a well-to-do relative of Mrs. Maloney's, however, and being a bachelor—there was the ' reason.'

" Phelim, revolving the matter in his mind as he bowled along, felt anything but pleased at the prospect of meeting and conveying home ' the dandy,' as he called McGinty, in contemptuous reference to his town-acquired

airs and graces and the elaborate get up of his insignificant little person. As Phelim said, McGinty was 'nothin' to luk at if it wasn't for the fine clothes an' gewgaws he had on him.'

"Possessing a short, spare figure, a thin, cadaverous countenance and pale blue eyes, he owed anything there was striking in his appearance to the fact that he was got up in the height of fashion, displaying a profusion of jewellery, carrying a gold-headed cane, and dangling in front of him a pair of gold-rimmed eyeglasses which he never required at all.

"It was the chief aim of McGinty's existence to be considered a gentleman by virtue of his money and fine clothes, and, like the generality of those who set up in the character with such mistaken notions of what really constitutes it, he succeeded admirably in impressing people with the conviction that there was nothing of the gentleman about him.

"Be that as it may, when our honest farmer, dropping jauntily down the middle of the High Street late in the afternoon, with his hat cocked on one side, and a suspicious twinkle in his eyes, foregathered with his kinsman, he showed no sign of dislike but, on the contrary, seemed very well pleased at the meeting.

"'How are yez, yer honour?' enquired Phelim, extending his hand in quite a friendly way.

"'Sure, it's delighted I am to see yez. Come over an'—'

"'Not a dhrop, not a dhrop, Maloney,' replied his cousin, with a comical grimace. 'I'm a teetotaler since the first day of April—All Fool's Day—whin I tuk the pledge, sayin' to myself there would be *wan* wise man to the fore at anyrate.

"'Yer lukin' well, Phelim. How's the family?'

"'All in the best of health, Sir, thankin' yez for the enquiry; an', by the way, the wife's expecting yez at Ballyraggit, so I'll dhrive yez over. No objections, if ye *plaze*—'

"'There's nothin' I have to take wid me, barrin' a calf I bought of wan Barney Gallagher—a quiet little baste it is, that'll be no throuble at all, at all.'

"So McGinty, who had no engagements, agreed to go over, 'for a breath of fresh air,' as he said; and that matter being definitely arranged, he was easily persuaded to accompany Phelim to the hostelry where the pony was stabled, on the distinct understanding, however, that he was not to be expected to 'take anything.'

"We have not made it our business to

enquire particularly into the proceedings of the next two hours, during which Phelim and his cousin were closely closeted with a select party of country folks, who doubtless had many weighty matters anent crops and cattle to discuss, but when, at length, the couple emerged into the Inn yard to prepare for their homeward journey Phelim's manner was decidedly boisterous, and his hat cocked more on one side than ever ; and as for McGinty, there was a strange limpness about him, which seemed to denote that if he had not 'taken anything,' at least the atmosphere of the Inn had not agreed with him very well.

" As a matter of fact it cost the stable-boy considerably more trouble to get the little man into the cart than the calf ; and as he would persist in sitting down on the straw and clasping the animal firmly round the neck, to 'hould it in position,' the opinion of that same stable-boy, loudly expressed too, was that the gentleman was 'as dhrunk as a fiddler.'

But away they went at last, Phelim sitting up as straight as you please and remarking, 'Yer best there, McGinty, my man. Divil the fear of yez fallin' out there, onless it's wid yer bosom frind, the calf. Now for Ballyraggit ! '

" What a home-going it was, to be sure !

And what a commotion there was when they landed! Phelim, as usual, not so bad; McGinty—how shall we attempt to describe him? What with the jolting (was it likely Phelim would spare the whip out of consideration for McGinty's bones?), the persistent efforts he had made to keep up when he was up, and to rise when he was down; and the close connection he had maintained through it all with the hoofs of the 'quiet little baste' he had for a travelling companion, it was McGinty turned inside out, McGinty upside down—anything, in fact, but McGinty the 'dandy.' There the little man lay, curled up in the straw, a woeful example of fallen greatness.

"The dainty brown kids he had purchased on that April day which saw him come out so triumphantly in the character of a wise man—the calf had sucked to shreds in a vain attempt to extract nutriment out of them; and the fine silk hat he had but recently invested in—as being 'up-to-date and a perfect gem of a thing—was a hat no longer, the frisky little animal (mistaking it for a milk-pail, no doubt) having dipped his nose into it fifty times on the cart bottom.

"To make a long story short, the upshot of this wild work was that when Mrs. Maloney appeared, lantern in hand, to receive her

distinguished visitor, she could but stand in wonderment, and ejaculate in a wailing tone, 'Phelim, Phelim, in the name of *heaven* what's this you've brought home wid yez? Is it a man or a monkey?' and Phelim was fain to confess that it was 'hard to say.'

"Poor McGinty lay in bed for a couple of days sadly pondering on the melancholy fact that resolutions which are made on the first of April are not particularly remarkable for their stability, and seriously considering the advisability of framing a new set for his future guidance.

"If there was little in the incident to excite mirth in the elders, you may be quite sure the 'boys' took in the fun of the affair readily enough; and it was made known over the whole parish the very next day that the 'ould man' had brought home a fine bull-calf the night before, and that for a reason duly given they had christened him 'Peter McGinty.'"

"Ay, man, an' wha, think ye, gat McGinty's siller i' the hinneren'?" was John's unexpected, not to say disconcerting, enquiry the moment I had finished my reading.

"That's more than I can say, Mr. Guidhert," I replied.

"I doot Maloney's wife wadna see the

colour o't after the wey her man had hawnled the cousin. Eh, Tammas?"

"I really cannot tell you."

"An' did Maister McGinty keep the tee-total after that awfu' dooncome o' his?" asked Janet with some show of anxiety.

"I should hope so; but it's impossible to vouch for it."

"That's the warst o' thae fancy stories, Tammas," said John caustically. "Ye've aye sae muckle to speir [ask] aboot whan ye're through wi' them.

"An' mind ye, it pits ane in a kind o' fret no to hae answers to ane's questions.

"Far better no to read them ava, to my wey o' thinkin', for they're naether edifeein' nor upliftin'.

"Tammas, my man, hawn ower the Book, an' I'll read oot my chapter afore we settle doon for the nicht."

This was in accordance with John's invariable practice, and the only occasion upon which I was absent from the observance was when I went to see "Rob Roy."

The chapter was read, the door was locked, and I retired to my chamber.

The hurly-burly without having by this time subsided, I fell asleep almost on the instant and dreamt that my old friend, armed with a stout shillalah, was chasing

Irish farmers in all directions, and demanding in the richest brogue their money or its equivalent in calves.

Chapter XI
DAVIE THE DUTIFUL

Chapter IX

DAVIE THE DUTIFUL

There had been a large family born to the Guidherts—eleven I think I have heard Janet say—but they were scattered after the manner of families, some dead, some " South the Tweed," some abroad, and for many years prior to William's return from his long exile (of which I shall have to tell presently) only one remained in touch with the parent nest—Davie, the youngest, a massive man verging on forty, but whom Janet still fondly referred to as " my laddie."

Davie was by trade a blacksmith, but I never heard with certainty where he performed his daily labours except that it was in the neighbourhood of a rather bleak and uninviting part of the town, standing as it were aloof near the mouth of the river and given over to those whose occupations were connected with the land and the fishing industries.

This quarter having no attractions for me,

I never explored it, but there Davie worked and lived.

When on one occasion I questioned him as to the nature of his work, the only answer I got was, " Shoes an' ploo's, yetcettra," which to say the least of it did not contribute much to my enlightenment.

But with all his crudities, his rough exterior and uncouthness, he was a big-hearted fellow was Davie, free and jovial, with the pleasant face and ready smile of his mother, and I always liked him.

There was no more dutiful son than Davie. He never failed to put in an appearance nightly at Moat Brae, and if his manner when there was seldom marked by any great degree of exuberant friendliness or demonstrative appreciation, it was not because he was deficient in filial affection. It was just his way.

Calling as a rule in the early evening, his custom on arrival was to stand on the step, his hands in his trouser pockets, with one shoulder leaning against the door-frame, from which position, peering round the inner door, he would begin his evening's conversation with his parents in the kitchen.

To their oft-repeated requests to " Co' wey in-by an' no staun' there like a muckle stirk ! " Davie would as often reply that " he

wadna come in the nicht as it was gettin' late" ; or that " he had an errand to dae afore he gaed hame" ; and this went on until at some particularly interesting point in the conversation he would coolly walk in and plant himself on the chair nearest to the door, his bowler hat still on his head.

As time went on, he would gradually draw his chair nearer to the hearth at which the old folks and myself were seated and there remain without any further reference to the mythical errand or the lateness of the hour until his father, with a glance at the " wag-at-the-wa' " clock, would say,

" It's near ten, Davie lad," whereupon he would spring to his feet remarking,

" Mercy ! Hoo the time flees. See ye the morn's nicht," and hurriedly take his departure.

If, as sometimes happened, I chanced to be seated with my book under the bourtree-bush when Davie arrived, not only did I look down upon him as he twisted himself on the doorstep, but I heard all he said, although I failed to catch the running conversation with John and Janet within-doors ; and it was odd in these circumstances to listen to Davie's ejaculations addressed to the old couple in the kitchen.

As he was of a somewhat taciturn dis-

position he was not very effusive on his side in maintaining the conversation, usually contenting himself with such brainy efforts as "Imphm!" "Ou ay!" "D'ye say sae?" "Weel, weel, the like o' that noo!" "I raley couldna, no the nicht mither"—this, no doubt, in response to another spirited exhortation from Janet to "Come intil the hoose an' no staun' there haudin' up the door-cheek like a muckle softy!"

At one of these recurring appeals Janet actually came to the door, her eyes flashing and with every appearance of extreme anger. But, as a matter of fact, there was no anger in her thoughts for her nature harboured none; nor was the spoken word, though for the moment shrill and menacing, indicative of anything but intense affection for the ungainly lump of humanity lolling on the doorstep.

From the foregoing it will be inferred, and rightly, that Davie's reputation as a man of worth and integrity stood high among his fellows, but for all that he sometimes incurred a measure of censure by reason of a slight failing of his, which, however, as it "leaned to virtue's side," in my judgment, did him little or no discredit.

He was, in fact, accused of being "a wee near," that is niggardly, exhibiting occasion-

ally too great a regard for his own interest and the main chance.

Well, I am ready to admit that especially as regards money he was certainly more than ordinarily careful ; but this propensity I was inclined to set down to legitimate and commendable thriftiness.

And then again, as will be seen in the sequel, he had about this time a good and sufficient reason to husband his resources, for, as he now and then confided to his intimates, he was " gaun to tak' a big thing on."

However, to take an instance, there was the incident of the lost Library book.

One autumn time when he had dropped a book on his way to the Library he escaped the penalty by offering to keep the Library steps and the front of the building free from fallen leaves for a week during the absence of the caretaker.

When the book was handed in by the finder shortly afterwards, Davie, hearing of it, wanted to be paid for the work he had done.

The stony hearts on the Committee would not entertain his application.

They said he must just consider it as a public service rendered, and he had to extract what satisfaction he could out of that.

On the other hand, Davie possessed a nature full of sympathy and generosity, as

witness the splendid self-sacrifice he displayed when poor Barbara Clapperton collapsed at her post.

Going home one night as the nine o'clock bell was ringing, Davie noted when passing the kirk a singular quavering and uncertainty in the strokes of the bell; and on looking in at the belfry, he was just in time to save Barbara (the widow of the late bell-ringer, and who had succeeded him) from falling in a faint.

Davie assisted her home, and during the six-weeks' illness that followed he performed her duties religiously each week-day, morning and evening, without fee or reward.

His father, as may be supposed, was highly gratified during this period by his son's generous action, and was fond of referring to his performance.

"Davie's the boy for the bell," he would remark with a smile.

"He hes her fairly on the swing the nicht. He'll be in a hurry likely an' I warrant he's got a notion 'at the harder he pu's the suner his ten minutes'll be up!"

The chances were that Davie was anxious to call in on Barbara, as soon as his task was ended, with words of cheer and encouragement.

Many a visit did he pay her o' nights,

before hastening to his own distant home-quarter, slipping up to her cottage and shouldering the doorpost in the approved fashion, as though the place were on the point of tumbling about his ears.

" She was gaun a' richt the nicht, Barbara. Did ye hear her ? "

" Ay, Davie lad, I heard an' thocht aboot you forbye.

" It's awfu' guid o' ye, 'at is't, an' I'll never forget ye."

" Ou, it's nocht. Juist keep yer hert up, my woman, an' ye'll sune be pu'in' the rape again.

" But for ony sake, dinna start in ower sune or ye'll juist fa' doon as ye did afore.

" An' mind, Barbara, ye canna lippen [rely] on me bein' there to kep [catch] ye anither time ! "

So saying he laughed heartily, and with a cheery good-night turned off on his two miles tramp to his own home, happy in the consciousness of having contributed somewhat to the relief and peace of mind of one solitary creature stranded for a space on life's uncertain road.

Chapter X
THE ENGLISH MINISTER

Chapter X

THE ENGLISH MINISTER

"Mercy me! Here's the English Minister! Oot my wey, Tammas. D'ye no see?" exclaimed Janet in tones of feverish anxiety, as Tibby, the cat, rushing in at the open door skimmed past me a hairy fury with bristling tail and eyes aglow, and turning at bay in the farthest corner of the kitchen ran her hind legs up the wall and poised herself on her fore-paws like a sort of feline *danseuse*.

Absolutely no resemblance between this wild creature and a minister of any nationality, said I to myself. Turning to Janet for an explanation, I saw that she, poor woman, was in her own way just as wild as the cat. Suddenly displaying the agility of a circus girl, she made a dash at the round table standing turned up and out of use against the chest-of-drawers, and dragging it forward but not far enough, down crashed the top, wrenching off a drawer-handle and placing me in imminent danger of decapitation.

I sprang to my feet, and standing back against the dresser steadied that piece of furniture, fortunately for the crockery arranged

on the plate-rack ; for, as John had often remarked on special cleaning days, when there was a continuous flow of healthy activity within doors at Moat Brae the dishes were " fair ditherin'."

Having made for herself plenty of elbow room, Janet next pulled open the bottom drawer, and wildly clutching at the contents she drew forth with nervous haste a fancy table-cover and a tartan shoulder-shawl (which articles she evidently required) and along with them half-a-dozen pairs of stockings of various hues and a large ball of wool. This latter, commencing its vagaries the moment it saw daylight, first entwined itself round Janet's skirts and, after running between my feet, made straight for pussy, who, evidently apprehensive of another enemy, in her terror emitted a fresh series of feline protestations and bushed up her tail anew in the corner.

Putting on the shoulder-shawl, all awry, and with a long woollen stocking which had accidentally caught in the fastening dangling in front of her, Janet was now quite ready to receive visitors—that is, if her object was to perplex them with doubts of her sanity.

Although, on the face of it the good woman's rapid descent from her proud position as a douce, staid matron to assume the role of a

low comedian, with a touch of the "quick-change artiste" thrown in was inexplicable, on reflection I had a shrewd suspicion that I knew her mind sufficiently to understand her singular conduct.

The "English Minister," otherwise the Incumbent of the Episcopal Church of England at Dinnan—a little, rotund, pleasant-faced gentleman, who was hail-fellow-well-met with everybody—had been a frequent caller at Moat Brae for a number of years past, and was, in fact, a good customer there.

The Minister was extremely fond of gooseberries, and it was his custom to choose for himself a particular bush as soon as the fruit began to ripen, arranging with John to come, when so minded, during the season and eat his fill of the berries at his leisure, direct from the bush.

He had a fine white Pomeranian dog which always accompanied him, and which gave Janet no little concern every time he put in an appearance by reason of his unruly conduct and the dire effect his presence had upon Tibby.

To circumvent this, on one occasion the obstreperous animal was locked up in the peat-house, whence he emerged in a disgraceful condition and followed the Minister home with a coat almost as black as his own. Thereafter, it was an understood thing that

whenever our clerical visitor should enter the precincts of Moat Brae, it would be with his favourite on a leash.

Janet naturally argued from the sudden frantic condition of the cat, as we have just seen her, that the Minister and his undesirable companion were at that moment approaching, hence the poor woman's painful agitation.

While the performance was at its height, a heavy step was heard and John stood in the doorway with a peculiar smile on his face.

" Weel, bairns, what's a' the steer ? Janet, woman, ye've ta'en to the play-actin' at last, seemingly, an' a nice sicht ye've made o' yersel, I wull say.

" I ken richt weel what's garr'd ye dress up an' dance the polka—ye were expectin' the English Minister comin' in on ye. An' gin he had dune sae, wadna ye hae lookit far mair like a Christian juist as ye were, raither than turn yersel intil sic an' awfu' fricht as that ?

" Did I no tell ye days an' days syne 'at the English Minister was awa to Switcherland for his health ? "

" But, John, ye ken fu' weel 'at Tibby never gangs on like this excep' whan the Pomerawnian comes in at the yett.

" Look at her there spittin' an' girnin' in the corner."

" Hoots, guidwife, the Pomerawnian's no

likely to fash either you or the cat ony mair.

"It's a guid bit farther awa than the Minister, puir thing, for it's deid an' buried."

Janet looked very crestfallen, and John whispered to me behind his hand,

"Tammas, come awa intil the gairden a wee till she settles doun."

He drew me away designedly, perceiving that the poor woman was overcome with shame on account of the commotion she had caused.

It will have been noted at several points in the course of my narrative that John's manner towards his helpmeet was occasionally marked by a certain discomfiting brusqueness and that his remarks addressed to her often enough had in them a distinct trace of both raillery and sarcasm. Let me say at once that in every instance this attitude of John's was the veriest make-believe.

The truth was that he almost worshipped the woman, and I myself have heard him declare with every appearance of sincerity that he was sure she had been made for him, and that he would never have been able to travel life's hard road without her.

So that the sly shafts of raillery, the more subtle innuendoes, the biting sarcasm, nay, even that fearful weapon—the deadliest in John's armoury of incisive criticism—yclept "the clincher," all of which he was in the

habit of directing against Janet from day to day, routing her completely at every attack, were no more than mere airy puff-balls, windy nothings, that contained not a tittle of acrimony or resentment.

Should it appear that I am labouring this point overmuch, it is only because I would not for the world have it supposed that in his relations with his wife John was in any sense a boorish ogre. To think so were to do the good man a great injustice, for he was anything but that, as I, who watched him, could very well determine as I noted the roguish twinkle in his eye even when he was launching his bitterest invectives.

As we paced the garden paths he expanded a little, and confided to me a chapter of their early married history bearing upon this failing of Janet's.

"Ay, Tammas, the guidwife's a' richt, a rale sensible cratur in fac', as ye ken yersel. But, man, there's aye some drawback wi' the weemen-fowk. She's that simple-minded ye wad think whiles 'at she hed a bee in her bannet.

"There was ae time no lang efter we were mairrit she fair cowed a' wi' her antics.

"We leeved in the lodge belangin' to a Big Hoose twa-three miles up the watter, an' ae day juist at the darkenin' (an awfu' het

day it had been, I mind) as I was sittin' in the gairden takin' a blaw at my pipe, Janet comes scraichin' oot the back-door like a wull thing an' gruppit me by the coat, trem'lin a' ower an' wi' her teeth chatterin' like I kenna what.

"'John, John,' she cries, gang awa through quick, the deil's in the hallan, an' he wants ye to hae the fires slocken'd an' a' ready for the morn whan the day daws! Oh, John, whatever's he wantin' here? We've never haen ony trockin' wi' him afore 'at I ken o'. Gang an' see him, John, but for ony sake speak quately an' dinna vex him, for he's awfu' fierce-lookin'.'

"I gaed an' saw nae waur a sicht than muckle Jock Soutar, the Sweep, on his wey hame frae his roun's, wantin' to leave word to hae a' ready at the Big Hoose for that he was comin' to soart the flues in the mornin'.

"Jock was a muckle buirdly, deep-throated chiel, beld on the croun, but wi' big wisps o' hair stickin' oot aboon his ears, no unlike horns; an' as he was black, black efter his day's wark, whan he took aff his bannet in the hauf-licht to wipe the swat frae his broo, Janet, wha was born an' brocht up at a lanely bit amang the hills, an' hed never seen a sweep afore, thocht she hed surely named him richt.

" ' But,' said she efter he was gane, ' there was ae thing 'at puzzled me sair for a' I was sae fleid, an' that was to fin' 'at the deil was a Scotchman ! '

" There, Tammas, that's Janet whan she was young, an' you can see weel eneuch 'at she's no a hair better noo she's auld.

" But ye'll ken mair aboot thae things for yersel as time wears on wi' ye, an' we'll no enlairge on the subjec' enoo.

" Co'wey in-by ; she'll be hersel again nae doot. An' hark ye, lad, we'll juist lat this flee stick to the wa' an' no vex her aboot her daft-like capers.

" I'll mebbe gie her a bit dunsh aboot it mysel whan a'm mendin' the drawer-hawnle."

Sure enough when we re-entered the kitchen we found a dead calm there.

Tibby lay sleeping on the hearth, and Janet, " clothed and in her right mind," was seated by the fire darning stockings and looking as though the tranquillity of the place had never been disturbed.

The only indication of the late upheaval that remained was the handleless drawer, and this Janet had cunningly screened—or, I should say, partially screened—from our view by drawing her arm-chair round a little way in an attempt to hide the tell-tale drawer as we sat at the fireside.

Chapter XI
HOME AGAIN

Chapter XI

HOME AGAIN

I had resided at Moat Brae about twelve months, and was just returned from a visit to my relatives in Lancashire at the close of the Mid-summer vacation, when it was my good fortune to witness under our own roof-tree a striking domestic drama, which, if rendered somewhat grotesque by an excess of stage artifice with the limelight playing a little too freely on the central character, nevertheless did not fail to move me deeply.

One evening as the darkness was setting in a knock was heard, and on Janet opening the door a stranger enquired whether Mr. Guidhert was at home.

He was shown into the ben room to await John's return from the Nursery, and, the door having been left open, I observed that as he sat our visitor looked continuously and with singular directness into the kitchen where Janet was moving about, and appeared to be intensely interested in all her motions.

From my seat at the fireside I had an excellent view of the room and its occupant, and I noted that he was a man of fine physique, about fifty, somewhat inclined to corpulency, and that he wore a full brown beard and heavily rimmed spectacles. He was well dressed, too, and showed in his air and person every mark of prosperity.

As soon as John arrived he went in to see the stranger, exhibiting unmistakable signs of trepidation and apparently burdened with a vague sense of coming trouble.

Upon rising at John's entrance, our visitor, taking a number of documents from an inside pocket of his overcoat, said in a subdued and somewhat constrained voice,

"I presume you are Mr. Guidhert?"

John confirmed this, and a thought striking him he added,

"It'll be aboot the cottage mebbe? We pey oor rent every hauf-year, but it's no due yet."

"I know that," returned the stranger, "for, as you suppose, my business is about the cottage, which in fact has recently changed hands.

"It is just a question how that circumstance will affect you, the tenant.

"You have lived here many years, I suppose?"

"Ay," said John tremulously, "we hae leeved here sae lang 'at we've juist grown to the place.

"I howp, if no on my ain accoont, at ony rate for the wife's sake, 'at we'll no hae to leave the Moat Brae."

"Well, as to that, we'll see what can be done. But the new proprietor will have plans of his own, no doubt.

"It's getting rather dark here for me to see my papers, could you——?"

"Ou, ay, Sir, come but the hoose an' the wife'll licht up.

"Janet, this gentleman's ca'd aboot the cottage; wull ye seek oot the lamp?"

This having been prepared and set on the chest-of-drawers, the stranger took a chair and, placing himself with his back to the light, he bent over his papers at the table.

"You have a son in California, I believe?" said he suddenly.

"Weel," replied John, "oor second son, Will'um, gaed oot there mair than a score o' years syne, but we haena had word o' him this—what'll it be, Janet?—nine or ten years past, I dar' say.

"Muckle hae we grieved an' mony a sair heart we've haen, baith the mither an' mysel, thinkin' aboot him.

"Maister, why dae ye speak o' Will'um?

Say richt oot, for lang hae we mourned for him."

"This I can tell you at once," answered the stranger, "he is alive and well.

"I have just returned from California, and before I came away Mr. Guidhert commissioned me to enquire after you both and learn what I could as to your well-being.

"Your son knew this place, I suppose?"

"Ay, weel he ken't it," said Janet softly, wiping her eyes with a corner of her apron, "for here he was born an' brocht up.

"He was aye a guid lad was Will'um, but he slippit awa frae us an' he's been oot o' oor sicht sae lang he micht juist as weel be deid."

"No, no; you'll see him again, never fear," exclaimed the stranger with emphasis, at the same time rising hurriedly as though anxious to bring the interview to a close.

"I shall be staying in the town for some little time and will call again, probably to-morrow, when we can have some further more intimate conversation about your absent son.

"I wish to leave this small packet for your inspection as I think you will find it contains something that will interest you both. Good-bye, friends, until I see you again."

With this he turned to the door and took his departure.

As soon as his footsteps had died away on the Brae, John opened the packet and was astounded to find that it contained the title-deeds of the house called " Moat Brae Cottage " ; the document setting forth in due form, that the dwelling and all appertaining thereto had been transferred to the present occupier, who was now also the owner.

There was besides a Bank Book in John's name showing a deposit of £500.

The old couple, in a state bordering on stupefaction, could do nothing but stare at each other and at me, giving vent to such broken utterances as, " Save us ! " " Mercy me ! " " Did ever onybody——? " " Tammas, this cows a'—is't a joke, think ye ? "

The following day passed without our mysterious visitor putting in an appearance, but on the next events accelerated their pace and culminated in such a scene of surprise, joy and thankfulness as I can never expect to see repeated.

At about the same hour as before the stranger called again, stepping in without knocking, and standing in the subdued light just within the kitchen door he deliberately tore off wig, beard and spectacles, and stood revealed as the long absent, but fondly remembered son, William !

" Ay, dear faither an' dear mither," said

the transformed " stranger," coming forward with extended arms, " it's mysel an' in the flesh.

" I mebbe shouldna hae cairrit oot this trick 'ats movin' ye sae sair ; but ye ken I was aye a great ane for ootlandish pranks, an' I juist couldna help mysel.

" An' it was far frae easy, mind, drappin' the Scotch an' talkin' English. I tell ye, it fair hurt my mou !

" Noo, hearken to what I say, faither. Ye're to keep your back a lot strechter in the future than ye hae dune in the past.

" It's aboot time ye were easin' doon, a'm thinkin'."

" It's ower guid o' ye, Will'um, far ower guid," quavered John.

" Ay, is't," echoed Janet, weeping silently.

" Aweel," he replied, placing his hand affectionately on his mother's shoulder, " there's a gae ween fowk wha boast a lot aboot the great things they've dune for the guardians o' their early days, while a' the time onything they'd ever dune was nae mair than their plain duty.

" It's late, late in the day wi' mysel, Gude forgie me ! But a'm tryin' to dae my duty noo.

" Come, look blythe, mither. Ye can surely smile noo whan ye think o' thae lang-by

days 'at were sae happy for a' their cares and trials.

"Faither, dinna be sae dowie. Fire up a wee, my dear, an' lat's see ye shake yer neive at me as ye used to dae sae aften langsyne."

For long after this memorable and affecting re-union, we were entertained and not infrequently saddened by William's account of his experiences during those weary years of separation.

His struggles and failures; his grim fight against adverse circumstances; and his final success—these went to the making of a wonderfully variegated picture, every feature of which my impressionable mind took in with avidity and interest.

But for the old folks, who were so nearly concerned and so greatly benefited by their son's act of filial duty, there was one dominant thought which vibrated constantly in the innermost recesses of their thankful hearts—"Will'um's hame again."

Chapter XII
DAVIE "KICKS"

Chapter XII

DAVIE "KICKS"

It was, perhaps, inevitable that simple-minded Davie, with his narrow mental outlook and crude notions, and after having been for so many years in sole possession of his post at Moat Brae as watchful caretaker of the place and devoted guardian of its revered inmates, should look upon his newly-returned brother, so free and easy, so prosperous and polished, and (as Davie put it) "fair weighted doon wi' siller," as more or less of an interloper.

And unfortunately this unlooked for contretemps created for a time an atmosphere sufficiently disturbing to affect the spirits and temper of his parents, whose peace of mind had remained for so long unbroken by domestic troubles.

On the eventful evening of William's first call at Moat Brae in the character of a mystery man, Davie turned up a very few minutes after his brother had left, and upon hearing

from me what had occurred to mystify and bewilder the old folk and plunge them into the state of wondering stupidity in which he found them, he freely expressed the opinion that we had been favoured with a visit from a wandering lunatic ; and he at once avowed his intention to call in at the police-station on his road home and urge the Inspector to set Beattie, the Constable, on the track of our mysterious visitor.

" It'll never dae," said he, " to hae sic a fause loon as that roamin' aboot the toon an' forcin' his wey intil fowk's hooses.

" I tell ye, we'll nane o' us be safe in our beds till he's laid by the heels."

As for the title-deeds and the Bank Deposit Book, on seeing these Davie shook his head dubiously and declared they just confirmed his suspicions.

" Can ye imagine ony leevin' cratur in the haill length an' breadth o' Scotland, 'at wasna daft, flingin' his siller awa at that rate to fowk he'd never seen in his life afore ?

" I wad as sune believe 'at the mune's made o'green cheese or 'at Twittery's gien up talkin'."

Later, when the true facts came out and his brother stood revealed, Davie still maintained that William " surely had a bee in his bonnet, an' was nocht like as soun' as he micht be in the tap story."

Nursing this fanciful idea of his, Davie, very injudiciously, went straightway and confided his doubts as to his brother's sanity to the Cronies who assembled nightly at the Town Cross to air their views, exchange racy items of gossip and generally poke their noses into other people's business; and these worthies, while commending his wisdom in unburdening himself to them, contrived to extract from the simple soul every ounce of information he could give them bearing upon William's vagaries.

On leaving the Cross, which he did gradually in a series of half-turn glides, necessitated by the volley of final queries discharged at him as he retreated, Davie fired a parting shot.

"Aweel, Cronies," he shouted, "it's a michty guid thing for oor Will'um 'at he hesna to wark for his ain leevin' as he's sae wake i' the noddle—an' I assure ye he hesna, for he's fair weighted doon wi' siller."

That was enough.

The Cronies, taking their cue and giving free rein to their propensity for exaggeration, it was promptly reported through the town that "John Guidhert's Will'um had come back hame ower the braid seas little better than an eediot, an' wi' that muckle siller to his ain cheek 'at it had turned his brain lookin' after't."

It goes without saying, then, that poor Davie experienced more than one " crowded hour " following upon his brother's home-coming ; and it is a fact that before the close of the first week thereafter he had become firmly convinced in his own mind that William's advent was little short of a calamity.

Mounting guard at the door-post one evening, his bowler hat a-tilt at quite a rakish angle but with a most lugubrious expression on his ruddy countenance, Davie, in caustic humour, dropped hints plainly showing the state of his feelings.

" Hes yer fancy man been here the day, mither ? " he enquired moodily.

" What mean ye, Davie ? " queried Janet, turning to gaze at him with a perturbed expression in her kindly eyes.

" Ou, ye ken weel eneuch what I mean an' wha I mean," replied Davie.

" Siller's no everything, lat me tell ye that, mither ; an' gif oor Will'um's nae better mainners than to come here rigged oot like a play-actor, to rule the roost an' set us a' by the ears, it wad hae been far better for him till hae bided at his Californy."

" Noo, Davie lad, ease doon a wee, wull ye," interrupted his father sternly.

" Ye'll surely never mak' trouble in oor

bit hoose whare we've been sae canty an' happy thegither a' thae years!

"Man, I wunner at ye."

At this juncture, as ill-luck would have it, William turned in at the gate, and playfully seizing Davie by the elbows from behind, he ran him into the kitchen head foremost, his bowler hat being jerked off and performing an acrobatic feat on the floor to the sudden discomfiture of "Tibby," who bristled up and pawed viciously at the hat with fierce eyes.

This somewhat ill-timed if harmless move on William's part, really born of high spirits and good temper, served but to inflame Davie's smouldering anger, and turning on his brother the moment his arms were free, he placed himself in a fighting attitude and invited William to "come on an' hae't oot!"

"Man, man, Davie," quoth William, "I wadna act the fule gin I were you, for that's juist what ye're daein' enoo.

"It's easy seen 'at ye'll need to traivel to enlarge yer mind, Davie lad; an' ye couldna dae better than pack up yer traps an' toddle off for a year or twa."

"Ou, never that, never that, for mercy's sake," wailed Janet.

"Ay," retorted Davie, "a'body can see weel eneuch what traivelin's dune for you.

"I wad far rather bide whare I am an'

what I am than gang aboot the toon wi' a swalled heid, as ye've dune ever sin' ye cam' hame."

"Better haud in noo, Davie," said William, with an indulgent smile and placing his hand lightly on his brother's shoulder.

"The day'll come when ye'll be rale sorry for this. Mark my words."

"Ou, wull't? Aweel, a'm no lookin' for't," sneered Davie, recovering his bowler and taking his stand again on the door-step.

When shortly afterwards the brothers had departed (Davie first in high dudgeon) and I had gone ben the house to my books, the old couple commenced an earnest conversation bearing upon the slight domestic breeze that had just ruffled our habitual calm; and, tender memories being awakened, they referred pathetically and with many a sigh and fond ejaculation to the ups and downs of those distant days when their children were all young and helpless about them, to the inroads made by death in their little flock, and to the many and oft-recurring cares and anxieties they had endured in the upbringing of those that a kind Providence had spared to them.

At length, ending this heart-to-heart communion on the varied happenings of the past,

Janet again made reference to the evening's disquieting incident.

"What ails Davie ava to gang on this gate at Will'um?

"Ye mind, John, hoo carefu' an' kind Will'um was aye wi' Davie whan they were baith wee weans?

"Ay, an' hoo he savit Davie frae droonin' thon awfu' day whan he slippit awa frae my knee and fell intil the watter, an' Will'um draggit him oot by the hair o' his heid.

"Davie was ower young to haud it in his mind, I ken, but mony's the time he's heard aboot it sin syne, an' he micht weel think o't noo 'at his brither's hame again."

"Ye're richt, lass. Will'um wadna hae lat the win' blaw on wee Davie gin he could hae helpit it.

"But ye needna fash yersel, Janet. Tak' my word for't, Davie'll change his tune gin ye'll gie him time.

"Ay, I shouldna wonner but he'll live lang eneuch to fin' oot 'at Will'um's the best frien' he hes i' the warld."

And so, indeed, it proved as time went on.

Chapter XIII
A TRIP BY RAIL

Chapter XIII

A TRIP BY RAIL

Among the various occupations comprised under the term Manual Labour, by which men earn their daily bread by the sweat of their brow, perhaps as easy a one as any to relinquish on the day of retiral at the close of life's active work, is that of the gardener. For when his muscles and sinews, responding less and less freely to the demands made upon them, threaten to give out with the end of the day's work at a greater and greater distance, surely it is a *desideratum* that, without entirely laying them aside, he should find his tools and implements so long the grim reminders of unremitting toil, suddenly transformed into the mere handy accessories of a delightful hobby, to be apostrophized at his own sweet will: "Servants! give me your aid." "Servants! that is enough—lie there."

John felt this to the full, and the old man became young again and voiced his sense of

freedom merrily, from day to day, like the happy birds about him.

But even so, he was not entirely his own master, and he had perforce to mind his p's and q's.

His son, William, had come home with the fixed intention of taking the care and labour out of his parents' lives so far as it was in his power to do so ; and whenever he saw his father working it seemed to him that his fondest hope was being shattered.

" Noo, faither," he would say on stepping in at the gate and finding John hard at work in the garden, " what's the meanin' o' this ?

" Hae I come back ower the braid seas wi' a settled purpose in my heart only to find 'at ye'll no help me to cairry't oot ?

" Drap thae tools, wull ye, an' smairten yersel up as sune's ye can. I want to see ye gaun aboot the toon an' haudin' up yer heid wi' the best o' them.

" I'll sune get ye a man to soart the gairden."

So John found it necessary to temporize, and he was careful, without always obeying William to the letter, to devote a good share of his leisure to little schemes of holiday making, which necessitated more than ordinary attention to his personal adornment.

He sometimes said to me with a pawkie

smile at such times when he was in the midst of his preparations,

" Tammas, I hae Will'um's orders, an' a'm gettin' mysel up regairdless o' expense."

This new order of life at Moat Brae had not been long inaugurated before it became clearly apparent that it was to have a direct influence upon myself.

I have already indicated that John had a fondness for inveigling me into accompanying him on his little riverside jaunts, and now, when with his increased leisure and spurred on by William's manifest approbation he took to arranging excursions further afield, he never failed to request me to join him, whenever he knew it to be possible for me to give him my company without any infringement of my school duties or responsibilities.

And, truly, I was always ready enough to accompany him, for notwithstanding the disparity in our years I considered John a delightful companion.

Some of the exuberant joyousness of youth that surged in my own breast seemed to re-animate him as well as soon as we got clear of the town, and, moving countrywards, found ourselves becoming more and more imbued with the delights born of a close communion with nature.

His exaltation of mind gave the idea of

one who, having happened upon a perennial spring of youth in early life, had been privileged to refresh himself with its rejuvenating waters throughout the fleeting years.

Still, while admitting whole-heartedly that our little excursions were a source of unfailing pleasure to me, I have one or two reservations to record.

As a companion John was all that could be desired—equable in temper, joyous of spirit—during our rambles on foot and within reasonable distance of home ; but whenever at William's instigation we undertook longer journeys necessitating vehicular assistance, he developed the most surprising eccentricities accompanied by an irritability of temper that was anything but agreeable.

Our longest journey was to the County town of D———, some sixteen miles distant, and that was the only occasion on which we travelled by train.

It was once too often for John, however, for he had no fancy at all for that form of locomotion.

" I've garr'd my ain feet dae my turn sae far on life's road, Tammas, an' it disna suit me ava at this time o' day to clim' intil thae noisy, unchancy consarns."

However, he made this one concession in deference to William's expressed wish that he

would " pluck up an' gang an' see the Bailie," a cousin of John's in a large way of business as a Corn Factor at D———.

" I warrant he'll be rale pleased to meet ye again," said William, " whan he sees ye sae weel set up an' wantin' nocht frae him."

And so we went, and the trip certainly contributed a good deal to my enjoyment, Bailie Proudfoot turning out to be not only a man of substance but an undoubted character in the town ; and his quaint speech and oddities of manner tickled me not a little.

Over twenty years had elapsed since John and he had last met, and, as William predicted, our welcome was of the heartiest nature, the Bailie doing his utmost to make the day pass pleasantly.

Towards myself he displayed particular urbanity, his desire evidently being that I should see as much of the " auld toon " as was possible in the limited time at our disposal.

Among the places of interest we visited was the Observatory, which, occupying a dominant position in the centre of a beautifully laid out and flower-bespangled eminence overlooking the town, commanded wide and entrancing views in all directions.

This attractive building was surmounted by a Camera Obscura, and, although some-

what difficult of access, especially for men of the height and girth of John and his cousin, the latter was determined that I should see it in action.

Accordingly, up the narrow, spiral staircase we made our way, and much to my astonishment (for it was my first experience of such an exhibition) I found myself in a pitch dark chamber of mystery. My surprise was quickly turned into delight when the attendant began to operate the Camera, throwing on a circular table the most enchanting views in miniature of outside objects, portrayed in their natural colours, and with all the motions of life—wonderful stretches of sunlit river, waving trees, birds in flight, mansions, park-lands, circling hills and the distant sea.

Then, as the lens revolved, the busy streets of the town were presented to our gaze—pictures of life and movement that entranced me so completely that I stood spellbound.

The Bailie took it all in phlegmatically enough up to a certain point, while John was intent but silent. Suddenly, however, the first-named gave vent to an angry exclamation as a turn of the lens disclosed his own warehouse in one of the principal thoroughfares, with horses and vehicles at rest, and men on the pavement plainly to be seen idling their

time away instead of pursuing their ordinary avocations.

"The rapscallions! Look at that!" roared the Bailie. "My conscience, John, I maun mak' an alteration here," and, descending the stairs, he found a messenger to go across the river to his warehouse for Turnbull, the foreman.

"Tell him to come to the Observatory at aince to see the Bailie—at *aince*, mind. Tell him to rin as hard's he can for that there's been an accident."

He added, *sotto voce*, "That'll mebbe shake the fat loon up a wee."

Turnbull arrived post-haste, breathing hard, and he was mightily surprised to find himself conducted up the winding stair to the room of mystery (his first visit), and even more so when the Bailie, in a stern voice sounding weird in the darkness, bade him look at the board.

"What hae ye to say to that, Turnbull?"

"It's a lee, Bailie; it's a lee, I assure ye," exclaimed the foreman in a state of great agitation and wiping the perspiration from his face with a trembling hand. "Somethin' maun hae gane wrang wi' the machinery."

"Weel, Turnbull, lat me tell ye this. I'm likely to be here gae aften in future, an' the first time I catch the machinery—as ye

ca't—turnin' oot sic a disgracefu' sicht as that, I'll dischairge every man o' ye! Noo, awa wi' ye an' see what ye can dae."

Turnbull departed, leaving us to the examination of the valuable and interesting exhibits assembled for inspection in the lower rooms of the building, and when, an hour later, a second visit was paid to the Camera Obscura, expressly to have the lens again turned on the warehouse, it was to find every man working as if his life depended on it.

The lesson was one that Turnbull never forgot, and from that day forward many a doubtful glance did he and his subordinates direct to the prominent tower standing high on the far side of the river, ever looking down upon them with its hidden but none the less observant eye.

Upon leaving the Observatory, we resumed our ramble about the quaint streets of the old town, and it was easy to see that my companion was anything but pleased at having to submit to his cousin's express method of showing us round; nor did I wonder at it, the experience being so entirely at variance with the habitual calm of our deportment during the leisurely strolls we were accustomed to in our own neighbourhood.

And when the Bailie took to stopping short at frequent intervals and leaving us for ten

or fifteen minutes at a time to enable him to make business calls, clearly with a view to the "siller" at the back of them, John's temper was tried almost beyond endurance.

Later in the day, about noon in fact, upon being ushered into the Bailie's sanctum by that indefatigable man of affairs, as he put it, to "rest a wee an' ease oor shanks," while he took "a rin roun' the warehouse," John's anger broke out.

"Tammas," said he, "a'm amaist sick o' this business.

"I mak' nae accoont o' trailin' a' ower the toon as we hae dune the haill mornin', to say nocht o' bein' pu'ed up every twa-three meenutes an' left to hing aboot on the causey like a pair o' muckle gowks [fools], an' what's mair I'll pit up wi't nae langer, Bailie or nae Bailie!"

Another thing that perturbed John greatly, seriously interfering with his enjoyment of our visit, was the thought of the return journey.

He could not bring himself to regard with equanimity the near approach of train time, and when we were on our way to the station he actually wanted to strike into the high-road for Dinnan so as to give the railway and all connected with it the go-by!

Now, although so much younger than my

companion and naturally possessing far greater power of endurance, such an alternative to a comfortable rail journey I could not but regard with horror.

What! A tramp of sixteen "lang Scots' miles" and arrival home dead beat in the small hours. Never!

Mildly but firmly I begged to be excused, pleading with him to sink his fears and apprehensions, which I characterized as mere chimeras.

Beseeching and expostulating all the way, I at length lured him into the station, and safely ensconsing him in a waiting-room, kept watch upon him until the train arrived and bore us away.

But even then my troubles were not over, for during the journey my susceptible companion had a bad attack of nerves, which seemed likely to still further endanger our peace and comfort.

It occurred at an intermediate station, when the train restarted with a very violent jerk.

John closed his eyes, gasped, and screwed up his features as if in great pain, much to the amusement of our fellow travellers. He recovered somewhat before the train had gathered speed, and I heard him muttering to himself,

"Catch me on this infernal thing again gif only I hae the luck to win clear o't this trip wi' a haill skin."

When we made the next stop, four miles short of our destination, John rose, expressing his determination to alight and take to the high road; and he was only dissuaded from carrying out his purpose on my pointing out with what composure I could command that we should certainly get ourselves into trouble if we gave up our tickets at the wrong station.

Of course, all this meant a fresh burst of hilarity from the other passengers and more blushes for me.

In summing up that long and active day, I recall that it provided for my young mind a strange mingling of undiluted pleasure with anxiety and excitement; but on the whole I can safely assert that joyousness, induced by the novelty of my experiences, predominated.

As for John, he evinced a singular reluctance to enlarge on the day's doings before me; but after I had retired to my room I heard him discoursing on the subject while preparing for bed, his voice taking on a fretful and self-pitying tone that amused me greatly.

"Ay, Janet woman, we've haen a gae rough time o't this trip," he said.

" The Bailie was kind an' a' that, but och ! what wi' the twistin' an' twinin' up intil dark garrets to see what ane can see far better oot-by, an' the awfu' quarrelling 'at gaed on atween the Bailie an' his men-fowk, I tell ye it fair gat on my nerves, an' I hadna been in the toon twa hours afore I was wushin' michty hard 'at I'd never left my ain fireside.

" An' what think ye, guidwife," he added in a tone of great gravity, " we gat oorsels intil a railway accident 'at verra near did for me.

" But Tammas'll tell ye a' aboot that the morn whan a'm no here, for, believe me, I canna bear the thocht o't."

Chapter XIV
A TRIP BY ROAD

Chapter XIV

A TRIP BY ROAD

THERE was another excursion we undertook together, which afforded scope for a good deal of enjoyment, albeit there were moments during its progress when I was constrained to hang my head in shame at certain mannerisms and eccentricities of John's (due almost entirely, I verily believe, to his unaccustomed connection with a horse) which excited the humorous sallies and jeering remarks of the facetiously-inclined who watched us as we steered our course countrywards.

John having decided to prosecute this journey also on wheels (but in a manner more in accordance with his own idea of sensible vehicular locomotion), he hired a diminutive gig to which was attached an ancient piebald several sizes too large for it, both in an advanced stage of decrepitude.

From the moment this quadruped came under his control up to its leaving his hands

on our return from the jaunt, John appeared to be under a spell and lost his head completely. He hovered round the animal with the greatest solicitude before we took our seats in the disreputable-looking contraption that was to bear us up country, and after we started, although I am quite certain the last thought in the poor old horse's head was to run away—or even to run at all if he could possibly help it—John was in a perfect fever lest he should get the bit between his teeth and bolt!

I, too, entertained an apprehension, but it was that the animal would develop a tendency to fall asleep on the journey or possibly to lie down.

But I am anticipating.

Let me first introduce our ancient piebald *in propriâ personâ* before expatiating on his bad points. If he had any good ones, I vow that my close scrutiny throughout a long summer's day completely failed to discover them.

The eventful morning that was to see John assume the responsible duties of a Jehu rose calm and fair with all the weather signs propitious.

It goes without saying that we were early astir and our preparations proceeded apace, John's excited imagination conjuring up

visions of horse-drawn vehicles long before there was any probability of ours arriving.

Indeed, he was elated and excited to an extent that did not appear when we had to face the detested train journey; and he comported himself much after the fashion of a great schoolboy.

At every sound that broke the stillness without doors he was on the alert, and once when I heard the unmistakable clatter of cans in a farmer's milk float he hailed me from the kitchen,

"Get a move on, Tammas; here's the gig!"

Again, when my ears plainly told me that an approaching rumble was caused by a heavy cart delivering coals at a house farther up the Brae, John yelled out,

"Quick, Tammas! Hurry up, man; here she comes!"

He had no sooner spoken than the cart stopped, and the coals descended in an avalanche onto the cobbles with a mighty roar!

Our equipage was brought round to Moat Brae by one Pete Todhunter (or "Tod Horseman," as he preferred to be called), Dinnan's recognized "horsey" character, who was always dressed like a groom, and during all his waking hours haunted the yard

of a respectable Commercial Inn near the bridge, where, as he said, "they stabled the maist horses an' keepit the best whusky."

One peculiarity of Pete's was that when taking out a hired conveyance he invariably drove standing, and with a long straw protruding from his mouth. He somehow conceived that this added to his importance.

At any rate, the singular habit appealed immensely to the younger section of the community, especially when Pete was behind the piebald, as it gave them the idea of a trick-act at the circus.

Being altogether too risky to venture with his valuable turnout on the Brae, involving as it did a steep dip from the foot of the High Street with an even steeper climb up to our gate, Pete had to make a detour half-way up the High Street and along certain cross thoroughfares to enable him to approach Moat Brae from the Town Head side.

As the piebald had never before traversed this route, naturally enough his advent attracted a troupe of juveniles, whose ranks were constantly strengthened as he passed along; so that on arrival at Moat Brae there was quite a crowd of youngsters, who, happy and hilarious, very deliberately ranged themselves along the wall over against our gate,

much like a queue of scholars at a cinema, and awaited eventualities.

Pete, in committing the whole concern to John's custody, handed him the whip with the remark,

"Dinna be fleyt o' giein' him a taste o' this every noos an' thans as ye dander alang, or, my fegs, we'll no expeck to see ye back till this day week at the sunest!"

Eyeing John up and down before departing, Pete smiled broadly, whistled and said,

"Man, Guidhert, ye're unco braw the day. A'body 'at sees ye'll ken richt weel ye're no gaun to a funeral."

And truly there was good reason for the man's critical notice, for John's rigout on this occasion was decidedly "loud," to say the least of it.

As a matter of fact, he had become more and more fastidious as to dress ever since William commenced his well-meant exhortations to his father to "cut a figure in the toon." This time, however, John fairly capped all his previous efforts.

For that very reason we did not get away on our journey with the ease and celerity which might reasonably have been expected.

This, be it remembered, was one of our "lang trips," and an extra special one at that, and John thought (as Janet, poor

woman, found) that there was far more in our exodus to-day than just walking to the railway-station, where, a little green flag having been waved and a toy whistle blown, the objectionable train bore us away on our travels.

Be it remembered, too, that—as has been previously hinted—the ordinary routine of John's daily habits being so greatly disturbed, he felt bound, at all costs, to let loose and indulge whatever of irascibility and perverseness lay dormant in his nature.

Janet took up a strong position on the score of her good man's appearance, and I must confess that she had my hearty approval in the stand she made, although I said nothing.

We did not so much object to the tight-fitting, bottle-green coat with brass buttons; nor to the gaudy waistcoat of a variegated flowered pattern and nankeen trousers; nor yet to the stiffly-starched collar showing on either cheek, and which, being firmly gripped by a tightly drawn neckcloth, seemed designed for the purpose of keeping his head in position; but when after a brief retiral ben the house he re-appeared with the whole surmounted by a very tall grey "lum" hat, with a very narrow brim, which turned him into a guy, his good wife exclaimed aloud at

the enormity and endeavoured to induce him to adopt some other more sensible looking headgear.

"Hoots, woman!" said he, with characteristic stubbornness, "this hat's been in the faimily I kenna hoo mony years, an' I think it's only fair to lat it see daylicht the day aboon a' days."

Before taking his seat in the gig he gathered a couple of huge buttonholes, one for himself, the other for me. I declined this offering, likening the great posies to danger signals on the railway; but on my questioning his wisdom in making so conspicuous an addition to his already full and complete personal adornment, he coolly placed the two lots of flowers together and carefully adjusted them in his coat, remarking,

"Sae that's your wey o' thinkin', is't, Tammas? I tell ye candidly it's no mine. Will'um's no for lattin' me wark in the gairden ony langer, sae naebody can blame me for wantin' to cairry a bit o't aboot wi' me whan I gang awa frae hame."

When at last we moved off, followed by the cheering children, Janet laughed heartily and called after us,

"It's weel said, 'There's muckle adae whan cadgers ride.'

"But I wush ye baith a guid journey an' safe hame again."

As we passed down the High Street we were altogether too much in evidence for my liking, seeing that numbers of sober townsfolk turned to regard us with meaning smiles and exchanged opinions on our unique appearance.

Sure Don Quixote on his Rozenante could not have excited much greater curiosity during his progress among his rustic countrymen than did John seated in solemn state behind his ancient piebald.

Despite my uncomfortable position, however, I could not refrain from laughing as we passed a group of impudent lads who indulged in certain vulgar witticisms chiefly at John's expense—witticisms which I had often heard far "South the Tweed," but in anglicized form.

"Whare did ye get that hat?"

"Daes yer mither ken ye're oot?" they yelled after us; and one excited urchin, with fine irrelevancy, shouted between his hands,

"Hoo's yer puir feet?"

But John, smiling happily, took it all in good part, and was quite imperturbed.

Nay, if anything, the ovation rather seemed to please him and flatter his vanity, for he remarked to me,

"We're makin' a stir in the toon the day, Tammas. I warrant the fowk dinna get a sicht like this every day in the week."

I agreed, for assuredly they did not.

At the foot of the High Street we crossed the river, and were soon bowling along countrywards, but we did not bowl along very far. If we expected our old charger to maintain a steady trot we were quickly undeceived, for without any warning he broke into a most disconcerting amble, with a kind of rotary motion in it, that nearly shook us both out of the gig.

"Mercy me! What's come ower the cratur," said my companion concernedly, as he held the whip straight out in front of him but without using it. "I doot we've been drivin' him ower hard; or hes he ta'en a fit o' the St. Veetus' dance, think ye?"

"I shouldna wonner, but we'll hae to ca' in the vet. at the far en', gif ever we win there."

The thought struck me that, having been accommodated in an evil moment with an old circus horse, he was bent upon entertaining us with a sample of his antics in the ring in days long past.

As we proceeded, however, the piebald became winded a little, and his tendency to caper abated. Thereafter he was content to

walk just as often and as long as he could get the chance.

John now became obsessed with the fear that we had injured our charge, and, his sympathies being fully aroused, he commenced a series of observations bearing on this one topic which bored me not a little.

At every incline he would descend from his perch—a work of time—to ease the overburdened animal, remarking at each descent, "What weight are ye, Tammas?" or "Tammas, ye're a big lump o' a fallow, hadna ye better get doon an' walk?"

This happened with such irritating frequency that I was led to wish sincerely that our course might lead us to the summit of a long, steep gradient, that the piebald might have the delectable experience of being pushed to the bottom by the momentum of the gig without more ado.

I have always consistently advocated kindness to dumb animals, but to pamper this one up hill and down dale on an eight mile run (save the mark!) as John was doing, vexed me sorely; and when I expostulated with him as he stood patting the horse's neck and feeding him with candy (he had provided himself with a huge paper bagful for the purpose) during a rest after a dreadful pull up a short incline of one in seventy or

so, he looked at me reproachfully and said,

"Ay, Tammas, I alloo a'm pamperin't a wee, an' what for no?

"The auld yad's mine juist for a single day, an' surely there's nae hairm to speak o' in makin' 't a kind o' holiday for the puir beast as weel as for mysel."

It will readily be conceived that, what with my wounded pride, the vain efforts I had made to facilitate progress, and tantalizing episodes of one sort or another, I chafed considerably throughout this trying journey.

But it was not until we reached our destination that my sensitive nature received its severest shock.

John's old friend, Andrew MacGowan, the Timber Merchant, to whom we were paying our visit, was on the look-out for us, and, taking the horse by the head on our arrival, he turned in at the Timber Yard gate and came to a stand.

John, however, stolidly kept his seat and made no move to descend from the gig.

"Ye'll lowse [unyoke the horse]?" inquired the Timber Merchant.

"Oh, no, it's hardly worth while, Andra."

"Ou, but ye'd better lowse."

"I think no the day. It's awfu' fashous to get her yokit up again."

"Weel, ye ken best yersel.

" An' Janet, hoo's she daein' thae days? Man, ye suld hae hired a bigger machine an' socht her oot wi' ye.

" But, John, ye canna sit there a' day!

" Hoots, man, doon ye get, an' you too, my mannie [this to me] an' I'll lowse in a jiffy."

" I dinna like the idea, Andra, I raley dinna. It's gaun to pit ye to an awfu' lot o' trouble."

Seeing that we had driven eight miles, that our entertainer had been apprised of our coming by letter, and that we were to drink tea and put in some time with the family before returning home, the perverseness shown by my companion in keeping his seat, as though he intended to move off again in five minutes, fairly " cowed a'," as he would have been ready enough to admit could he have seen himself.

We were just within the gateway of the Timber Yard adjoining Mr. MacGowan's house, and the Yard was separated from the village street by a low paling along which a dozen loungers were ranged, taking in all that was going on and evidently highly delighted at the oddity of our appearance, and by the ludicrous comedy enacting under their noses between John and the Timber Merchant.

The end man, who with his caustic tongue appeared to be the wit of the company, sent a message down the street behind his hand in a carefully modulated voice to certain idlers who were in danger of missing the fun.

I heard every word of that message with crystal clearness, and it caused me to squirm on my seat.

" Come here, boys, an' see this queer auld stick in the Timber Yaird.

" He's sittin' up in his gig as strecht as a Duke an' they canna get him oot o't dae what they will.

" I'll wager ye a croun the auld curio sleeps in't.

" He's a young ane wi' him 'ats apprenticed to the same tamfoolery seemingly, for he disna budge either.

" Losh, they're mebbe baith wantin' feet ! "

This touched me on the raw, and I felt myself blushing violently, while a wave of resentment at John's stubbornness swept over me.

The Timber Merchant, now beginning to fume and fidget, continued his pleading, his voice taking on a distinct note of asperity ; and when his daughter stepped briskly round from the house to ascertain what was keeping us, strict Elder of the Kirk though he was, he could contain himself no longer.

"D—— it, John, ye stupit auld fule," he yelled angrily, "ye'll surely get doon oot o' the gig as ye're here to tak' tea wi's!

"Ye'll never expeck the weemen-fowk to seek yer tea oot the hoose t'ye!"

"Aweel, Andra," said John, who appeared now to realize for the first time that there is a limit to patience, "seein's ye pit it that wey we'll mebbe better lowse." And we descended after a most irritating delay of twenty minutes.

During our drive home in the moonlight my old friend expatiated on the respectable figure we had cut during the day, and for the nonce gratified vanity escaped from him with every word he uttered.

As for me, I prayed inwardly that it might never again be my unhappy lot to galivant about the countryside with a man in the garb of a merry-andrew, bewitched and held in thrall by an old circus horse demoralized by an excess of candy and kindness.

Chapter XV

THE BELATED PORTRAIT

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Above the mantel-piece in my room hung an unframed portrait done in oils, which was the counterfeit presentment of John Guidhert, painted years before by the Artist grandson previously mentioned, at the age of fourteen.

As was to be expected, the execution of this juvenile effort was somewhat crude, but the likeness to the original was unmistakable, and it is a fact that the lowly-born and poorly educated lad whose work it was, lived to see, while yet in life's prime, his *magnum opus*—painted by royal command and involving years of concentrated labour—appraised in the Art world as a wonderfully clever achievement.

Always on awaking of a morning, that portrait of John's was the first object that attracted my gaze, and I never regarded the face of my aged friend, with its fine strong features, its expressive grey eyes and

capacious forehead, without a feeling that had he been more favourably circumstanced in early life and blessed with a sound education and the opportunity for advancement as he grew in years, he would certainly have made his mark in the world.

And often, too, have those compelling morning impressions of mine retained their hold upon me even when the subdued hum of school was in my ears, or with the racket of the playground around me, and, momentarily losing consciousness of my surroundings, I have found myself speculating with a kind of wonder on the singular influence (born of respect, I am sure) the old man had upon my thoughts from day to day.

I learned that, for years past, it had been a source of good-natured bantering and complaint on the part of Janet that Ewart had not fulfilled his promise given long ago to paint *her* portrait ; and he never returned from his protracted Continental wanderings but her playful badinage commenced and persistently continued at intervals during his stay.

" What, pent my portrait ! Na, na ; he wadna dae ony sic daft-like thing as that ! Save us ! me in a picture ! Wha ever heard o' sic a fuilish notion ! His grandfaither, ou, ay ; but no' the like o' me.

"Ye've aften eneuch promised to pent me for a' that, an' ye canna deny 'at ye've haen chances enoo'. But Ewart, lad, we a' ken what promises are like, an' why."

Ah, had granny but known!

Even as he approached the humble cottage to which his affections turned, as the needle to the magnet, he was dreaming of an ambitious canvas to occupy him in the coming days—no less a thing than the portrayal of an affecting scene from Lady Anne Lindsay's pathetic ballad of "Auld Robin Gray," with his grandparents figuring as the central characters!

The Artist, who had but recently attained his majority, came home from Spain for a prolonged stay during my residence at Moat Brae, coolly walking in at the kitchen door as unconcernedly as though he had just returned from a half-hour's stroll.

An imposing figure of a man he was, with regular clear-cut features, eyes dreamy in expression, but with a firm mouth and square chin that redeemed his face from any suspicion of effeminacy.

He had a shock of glossy dark hair, which was massed about his well-shaped head and hung in curls over an expansive brow.

Seating himself in the accustomed chair, he crossed his legs, and, entwining his long

fingers about his knees, smoked his pipe contentedly. And first of all, the usual enquiries were made about things in general, the Artist using quite as broad Doric as his grandparents.

Before long the old subject of Granny's portrait cropped up, and the familiar bantering began.

"Ye'll hae come a' the wey hame to pent me, likely? Or mebbe ye've gien that wark up noo?"

"You and your portrait, grandmither! Will ye no let me settle in the hoose but ye maun deave me wi' that!"

"A'm no wantin' nae portrait; it's no for the like o' me.

"Nay, nay, ye'll no pent ony portrait 'at ye're no paid for, I warrant."

"Weel, weel, Granny, I will paint your portrait ane o' thae days whan I can spare the time."

"Ay, ye'll be ready eneuch to pent me whan ye've dune every ither picture ye can think o'; an' whan that day comes whare will I be? Answer me that. No 'at a'm wantin' a portrait; far frae't.

"A shadow picture'll dae weel eneuch for the like o' me, whan the body 'at daes them comes oor gate again."

So Janet kept at it, and it was easy to see

that she was "working him up." While at Moat Brae, he never deserted broad Scots for standard English except when he had arrived at such a pass as this.

"I'll tell you what I'll do, Granny. I'll go down to the High Street and buy the canvas to-morrow morning before I eat my breakfast."

The next day when I came in at noon Granny was busy setting out the dinner dishes dressed in her best, while the Artist was seated beside his easel on which stood the new canvas, in a corner of the roomy kitchen, where the gable window afforded him a good light, mixing his colours.

Now this looks like business, thought I, and Janet's face confirmed it, for it was one expansive smile, which translated into words, said plainly enough,

"Ewart, my man, I hae ye cornered at last."

When the portrait was finished it was placed in a favourable position for John's inspection, and, of course, he must be hypercritical.

Standing back a few paces with half-closed eyes and head on one side, the pose he had so often seen the Artist assume, John hummed and hawed awhile and then said,

"Man, it's no that bad. Gae like her

chin, onywey ; but it's a wee pale aboot the nicht-cap, d'ye no think ? "

" Nicht-cap ? Ye muckle gowk ! " screamed Janet. " That's no a nicht-cap, as ye ocht to ken. That's my ain mither's best Sabbath mutch 'at she left to me wi' the warnin' no to wear't but only at a by-ordinar time. Nicht-cap, indeed ! "

" Weel, ye wull admit 'at the white mutch contrasts ower strangly wi' yer rosy face an' mak's ye look as if ye were ower fond o' a wee drappie whiles."

" Hoots, haud yer clatterin' tongue, for ye're nocht but a blether."

I took to myself the credit of estimating this effort of Ewart's more nearly at its true value, and decided that the likeness was well-nigh perfect.

Moreover I concluded that the soft light in the kindly blue eye, the apple bloom on the cheek, and the smiling mouth, conveyed as attractive a picture of contented, happy old age as could well be conceived.

The portrait found a place on the wall over against John's, and there they hung for years, unframed and unvarnished, until the sad day came when Moat Brae was dismantled and left to the echoes.

Not long thereafter both pictures, having received careful treatment from artistic hands,

and encased in rich gilt frames, were given permanent sanctuary in a much grander house than Moat Brae.

I may add that during the painting of the scene from "Auld Robin Gray," which was commenced soon after the completion of Granny's much debated portrait, I was afforded both interest and amusement in watching the progress of the work.

Coming in one day while the Artist was busy, I would see Janet in her highly-prized mutch (representing the mother) seated at the fireside, her face wearing a somewhat sad and woebegone expression befitting the subject; on another, there was John (posing as the father) his arm in a sling, but otherwise looking fit and vigorous, upright in his armchair by the window, his venerable head thrown into prominence by the dark background afforded by the corner cupboard.

It seemed quite appropriate on such occasions, and was certainly not unpleasing, to hear Janet singing in a quavering voice, but with feeling, too, a verse or two of the beautiful old ballad; while John crooned the air very softly by way of accompaniment, beating time with his horny fingers as he rested his elbow on the table:

"My father couldna work, my mither
couldna spin;

I toiled day and nicht, but their bread
I couldna win—
Auld Rob maintained them baith, and
wi' tears in his e'e,
Said, ' Jenny, for their sakes, will ye no
marry me ? '

My heart it said na, and I looked for
Jamie back ;
But hard blew the winds, and his ship
was a wrack ;
The ship was a wrack—why didna Jamie
dee ?
Or why am I spared to cry, ' Oh ! wae's
me ? ' "

Chapter XVI
TONSORIAL TROUBLES

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At a previous point in my narrative I have recorded how I assured John that I had never laughed at him, and truth to tell, I never had—to his face. But I am not so sure but that I may have been hard put to it at times not to laugh at him behind his back.

When he shaved, for instance (a task he abominately hated), his antics while laying his plans and making general preparations leading up to the operation were calculated to make the proverbial cat laugh.

His right foot going heel and toe as he stropped his razor, with a great upward sweep of the arm at every fourth beat, suggestive as I thought of some ancient shipwrecked mariner waving signals of distress ; his lips puckered and emitting a sound not unlike a hiss and a sigh, recurring again and again with mathematical regularity. Taken together they constituted a fascinating combination of soothing sound and rhyth-

mical movement, which when in operation for any length of time had quite a somnolent effect upon me, and sometimes actually sent me off to sleep.

Janet laid on the lather, and to hear John's plaintive protestations and the intermittent spluttering outbursts in choice Doric when the soap got into his eyes and mouth was quite a creamy joke for me.

"Eh, woman, gif only I had the chance on thy face wadna I mak ye scunner! I whiles think ye dae't wullfully juist to see me splutterin'! Dash ye, it's no fair."

It was only at such a time that John really had a crow to pluck with Janet, except now and then when not having laid her plans with sufficient care she had to disturb him after he was comfortably seated, to get dishes out of the corner cupboard.

Then, indeed, he was wont to fume a little, and, rising in a bit of a tear, he would stalk off to the garden, probably with a cross remark such as, "I jalouse ye wad raither hae my room than my company."

John was "gae touchy," as folks said, and, possessing a child-like nature, he sometimes acted like a child.

But it was only a momentary manifestation of temper, and being soon forgotten all was serene again.

Much against Janet's wish, as she told me—although it was never a subject of dispute between them—John made out that the only place which afforded him a proper light for shaving was behind the door in the hallan, or passage. Here there was just space in the corner for a high but narrow wash-hand stand, and above it he had hung a little mirror, which, receiving its light from the oblong pane of glass above the door, he said was "juist the ticket."

But this arrangement was not put into operation without a great deal of inconvenience to the proper working of things (and this was Janet's trouble), for whenever John was engaged with his razor behind the door it could not be opened without serious danger of an accident; and if a knock came suddenly the chances were that it would startle the shaver and jeopardize his face. Another source of recurring irritation to John was that every time the door was opened to a caller, he had to retreat to the room until the visitor left; and if Janet delayed in getting rid of the obstructionist, as was only natural at times if the person happened to be a garrulous neighbour who held the position by her prolonged chatter, John was to be seen through the half-open door striding about the room, razor in hand,

looking anything but dignified in his towels and glaring from above the lather like a caged animal—which indeed he was.

But I must give the good man his due. I am bound to say that once he had got the business over and was free again to use his tongue without let or hindrance, he recovered his equanimity instantly, and no one could have been cheerier or more humorously entertaining than he; his talk at such times usually turning on his tonsorial experiences in days long past.

Opening his budget of reminiscences on one such occasion he said to me,

"A'm no likely to forget the fricht I gat aince whan I was a young fallow a year afore I mairrit—I was mairrit at nineteen, ye ken. My face wasna black for want o' a shave, in fac' the down was scare aff't; but I maun be like ither fuilish fowk an' ettle at bein' a man afore my time. Sae ae day I plucked up courage an' gaed intil a wee barber's shop, but there wasna a soul to be seen in the place. I chappit an' better chappit withoot ony notish bein' ta'en, an' I was juist on the point o' comin' oot, thinkin' it was mebbe a judgment on me for wantin' a shave ava whan I'd nocht to come aff, whan I sees twa feet at the heid o' an open stair leadin' doun intil the shop. They

were slowly followed by mair an' mair o' a man comin' gingerly doun the stair haudin' on by the stair-rail wi' baith haun's an' wi' his een steekit. Man, it was the barber, as blin' as an ool, new waukent oot o' a drucken sleep.

"' Wan' a shaveshir ? ' says he.

"' Ay,' says I, ' ye've hit it. A'm wantin' a shave, but you're no the ane 'ats gaun to get the contrack ! I'll fa' back on you, my gentleman, whan a'm wantin' my heid aff.'

" I tell ye, Tammas, that raised Maister Barber's dander to some tune.

"' Wha' ye shay ? Mean t'inshult me ? ' an' he tried to rin at me wi' the razor in his haun', but he missed the chair he'd grabbit at an' whummle't doun on the floor on the braid o' his back.

" I cam' oot bangin' the door ahint me an' I haena seen the inside o' a barber's shop sin syne.

" Mind ye, a'm no sayin' 'at ye winna fin' heaps o' barbers 'at's the cream o' creation for carefu'ness—but thon fallow ! Keep us, he was a gem.

" Weel, I bocht a razor the neist market-day, an' by the time I'd ocht to come aff my face I could hawnle't fine, an' I've shaved mysel' frae that day to this. But, man, it's an' awfu' fash, an' I aften think there's no a waur thing for ruinin' the temper.

" My mither aye did her best wi' my hair, puir body; but her cut wasna what ane micht ca' scienteefic.

" She snippit awa here an' there aboot the croun, but she wad never come onywhere near the b'low pairts for fear o' snippin' a bit oot o' my ear, or pittin' the shears in my e'e; sae ye can guess what a queer-like figure I cut whan she'd dune wi' me.

" After I mairrit, Janet an' me pat oor heids thegither an' we hit on a plan 'at workit fine.

" She juist clappit a wee wooden bowl on the tap o' my heid, an' clippit a' roun' an' b'low't wi' the shears, an' after a wheen judicious snips aboot the croun the job was dune.

" My certie, it's savit me mony a pound!

" Weel dae I mind the lauch we had the day Janet an' me gaed up the street to the Bowl-maker's to buy a bowl.

" Whan I tried it on to see gin it wad fit the man glower'd like a stuffit monkey, an' says he,

" ' Man, ye'll never be short o' potted meat as lang's ye wear that, a'm thinkin'.'

" ' Richt ye are,' says I, ' an' gif ye'll tak' to wearin' ane close yersel, ye'll aye hae a guid supply o' cawf's-heid i' the hoose.'

" Man, Tammas, I was gae quick at the rapartee in thae days.

"Onywey, oor plan workit weel, an', ye ken, somethin' hed to be dune, for surely nae wull-man o' the woods ever had a towzier heid than mine whan I was a callant.

"Janet, woman, ye mind that day I cairrit ye ower the burn an' hoo ye hang on by my hair for fear o' fa'in' intil the watter?"

"Hoots awa, John, wi' your blethers.

"Ye're surely never gaun to say ocht aboot that silly wark," said Janet in a startled tone, while an unmistakable blush mantled in her cheeks.

"An' what for no, lass? Wasna't the best job I ever took in haun'?

"Ay, I was up the burn ae day fishin', Tammas, (wull I ever forget that day!) an' as I was busy soartin' my tackle, wi' my back to the watter, I gied the rod a swish ahint me an' the line hankit.

"Losh, whan I turned roun' I fan' 'at I'd hyeuked a lassie, staun'in' on the ither side o' the burn!

"Af coorse, I had to wade thro' to get things clear, but afore I'd dune I fan' there was an unco queer sensation in my breast, an' the lassie seemed gae flustered too. She tell't me she wantit to be ower the burn, sae I cairrit her across.

"Neist day, as I was fishin' at the same bit I gaed thro' the same performance wi'

my fishin' wand an'—what think ye !—whan I turned roun' to cast my line there was the lassie again waitin' to be cairrit ower !

" That's the lassie, Tammas."

" For shame o' yer face, John, I didna ax ye to cairry me ower."

" Na, but ye took guid care no to objeck whan I did it.

" Ay, an' whan I'd gotten her ower (confess, my lass !) I'll be dashed gin she didna want to be cairrit back again !

" Oh, I saw through ye richt eneuch.

" But, 'odsake, I wasna granein' nane, for man, there was nocht to grane at, cairryin' a bonnie bit lassie aboot in my airms."

Janet had nothing to say to this, but, with a deepening blush, she looked unutterable things at John.

He soon put matters right, however, by the eulogiums he passed upon her in estimating the value of the prize he so fortunately captured on that long-past but fondly remembered day up the burn.

Chapter XVII
A FLAUTIST'S MECCA

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Until after his first visit to Moat Brae, I had no idea that old Kenneth Moore, the itinerant flautist, was something of a power in our midst.

Of course, it never appeared that he actually ruled a section of his fellow-townsmen with a rod of iron, but certainly he succeeded in making his flute an instrument of torture to many sensitive folk, disturbing their mental calm and bending them to his wishes. And the very slowness of his methods contributed not a little to this end.

He was blind, poor fellow, and that lamentable affliction went far to disarm virulent criticism, but for all that there were occasional outbursts of caustic comment at the expense of the old minstrel which must have been anything but pleasing to him.

I had seen Kenneth (or "Kenny," as he was usually called) from time to time for many months before he came to the head

of the Brae and crossed our threshold ; but, as I have stated, I had no conception how completely he succeeded in dominating numbers of the town's folk during his passage along the meaner streets where they lived.

Had he set out with the avowed intention of producing a distaste for the National Minstrelsy of his country in the public mind, he could not have devised any more effective method of attaining his object than by means of that flute of his.

It was indeed a doleful instrument in his hands, and it is to be feared that he did his best to breathe out of it the most dolorous assemblage of notes he knew, hence, " Ye Banks and Braes o' Bonnie Doon," a melody whose abiding charm is never gainsaid when rendered as a song. But disassociated from the words and droned out over and over again all day long by Kenny's awful instrument, it was calculated to turn the stomach of the least susceptible even behind tightly-closed doors, and did, in fact, cause the dogs to howl piteously as he crept along the kerb.

He could play other tunes and play them well, but no doubt the old fox considered that if he stuck to a single melody, and that as doleful a one as was going, it would be an inducement for his auditors to give quickly

with the idea of getting rid of him the sooner.

A spare, gaunt figure of a man was Kenny, dressed in worn garments, his long, dark overcoat, tightly buttoned about him, being surmounted by a dingy top hat which for the most part drooped at a sharp angle from the perpendicular as he brought his bloodless lips into contact with the flute, which always drooped too as though it were held up with difficulty.

Gossip was at its height among the housewives in one of the thoroughfares of our town on a certain cold but bright morning of winter, when the tall figure of the old flautist suddenly appeared at the head of the street, flute in hand, filling the good dames engaged in low-toned chatter about their doors with instant alarm, and letting loose a flood of cross-street exclamations delivered in a much higher key.

A notable feature of Dinnan's side thoroughfares, generally speaking, was their extreme width, which always struck me as contrasting somewhat strangely with the humble whitewashed dwellings of one story forming the street, these being for the most part the ordinary " but and ben " cottages of the country.

So wide, indeed, were certain of the streets that conversationalists holding forth on either

side of them had to raise their voices to be heard clearly by neighbours opposite.

Thus, occasional passengers were often enough regaled with scraps of conversation which at times contained references to intimate personal matters that might very well have been ventilated in private.

As the old flautist started on his snail-like passage through the street and the opening notes of " Ye Banks and Braes " were wafted along on the crisp morning air, wailing cries arose and, a shrill voice having uttered the prevailing sentiment, " Waes me, neibours, but we're in for't again this day," the gossips scattered, and Kenny, who was by no means deficient in humour, improvised a series of the harshest and most dissonant notes his flute would give out to accelerate the women's movements.

And now a strange thing happened.

Creeping out from back-gardens and odd nooks and corners came a number of old fossils in every stage of decrepitude but smiling contentedly in spite of Kenny's cascade of dolorous, ever-recurring sounds.

They were stone deaf to a man, or near enough to it to glory in their immunity from torture at the flautist's hands, and to gloat over the sufferings of their invisible neighbours, the majority of whom evinced little

enough sympathy with the disabilities and physical weaknesses of old age.

" Boys, oh, boys," cried one of the feeblest among the newcomers in a cracked voice, which, of course, nobody heard, " we're in rare luck the day for auld Kenny's no walkin' weel ava [he himself leaned heavily upon two sticks], an' gude kens whan he'll win clear o' this.

" Sae lat thae silly craturs 'at canna thole the soun' o' the flute juist nurse their heid-aches ahint steekit doors, an' we'll tak' oor fill o' a toom [empty] street while we hae the chance o't."

We had always enjoyed a welcome freedom from these trying visits of the old flautist, for the reason that our house and the short row of cottages beyond it occupied a some-what isolated position at a little distance from the more populous thoroughfares running behind the High Street, and Kenny apparently did not consider it worth his while to push his way as far as Moat Brae.

As to why he eventually paid us a visit, I firmly believe that like a bird driven out of its course, he was forced upon us by exceptionally severe weather conditions, being practically compelled to leave the wide, exposed street last traversed for the shelter

afforded by the lofty boundary wall of the Moat House grounds.

Anyway, one dreary winter's afternoon he came to us for the first time, the earliest intimation of his approach being a long, wailing sound, faint but definite, like the rising and falling of the wind, which penetrated to our kitchen as the temperature was rapidly falling and the lowering clouds threatened snow.

"Gudesake, John, whatever's that?" queried Janet, pausing in her task and listening intently.

"Gin a'm no mista'en its auld Kenny wi' his flute, an' a'm wae for the puir buddy on sic a cauld and stormy day as this, an' him wantin' his sicht an' a'."

The sound gradually approached and, growing in volume, resolved itself into "Ye Banks and Braes," played continuously with that deadly slowness and dreary monotony which Kenny in his wisdom had striven so hard to reduce to a fine art.

As Janet spoke heavy snowflakes began to descend, and the sight of them roused John into a state of activity.

"Ay, it's Kenny richt eneuch," said he decidedly, "an' whare the auld fallow gets the win' to blaw intil that awfu' flute o' his a' day an' every day, dod, it's mair than I can tell.

" It's peetifu' to hear him."

Putting on his hat and drawing his overcoat loosely about his shoulders, he moved to the door, remarking,

" I'll awa oot an' tak' a look at the puir auld chap, an', Janet woman, ye micht set on the kettle an' we'll hae him in an' gie him a dish o' tea an' a bite to cheer the hert o' him."

On reaching his objective, John found the old man drooping in the road, with pinched face and fingers blue with cold, the very picture of wretchedness.

" Kenny lad, ye're oot on a raw eneuch day, the day, an' I wonner at ye for bein' sae reckless," said John, taking the old flautist by the elbow and arresting his steady output of mournful sounds.

" It's amaist cauld eneuch to freeze yer music as fast as ye lat it oot o' the flute, an' gin ye bide here muckle langer ye'll turn intil a snaw man an' the bairns'll juist dish ye wi' snawba's.

" See haud o' yer airm an' I'll steer ye to a bieldy bit [sheltered spot] 'at'll suit ye doon to the grun', I'se warrant ye."

" I ken ye, John Guidhert, ay, weel I ken ye, for there's nane but yersel 'at wad talk like that to the puir auld blin' man 'at's o' sae little accoont i' the toon.

"My certy, but ye're weel named, for ye hae a big hert, an' I thank ye mair than I can say.

"But, man, I maun juist keep at it, for it's little I hae ta'en the day yet, an' hoo'm I to pey for my lodgin' an' a pickle meal to keep body an' saul thegither."

For reply John took the old man firmly by the arm and walked off with him.

"Say nae mair aboot that, Kenny. We'll fin' ye baith bite an' sup an' something for yer pooch forbye.

"Haud up noo, an' pit yer best fit forrit."

And Kenny, weak and well-nigh spent, thinking to himself that he was in the grip of a giant, made no further objection.

Janet's welcome, needless to say, could not have been exceeded for warmth and heartiness, and, finding himself thus suddenly snatched, as it were, from the bitterness of a winter's day and placed in the centre of so much comfort and concern for his well-being at the hands of kindly friends, the tears sprang to his eyes and his heart within him swelled with joy and thankfulness.

During the evening Kenny tuned up and played for them a reel or two, a hornpipe and a strathspey, turning garrulous in the intervals and (had he but thought of it) just giving himself away.

"But, frien's," quoth he, "ye'll unnerstaun' this is no the kind I gie them back i' the toon.

"Na, na, that wadna dae ava, for they wad juist pit their heids thegither an' keep me on the bit the haill day lang.

"It's far easier for me to lat them hae something 'at'll touch them up in their tender pairts, an', faith, they get it!"

Davie arrived at the critical moment when his father was about to step out into the bleak night to set the old man on his homeward journey.

"Faither, whare ye gaun? Ye canna gang oot a nicht like this; it's no safe.

"I'll set Kenny on the road hame mysel', gin that's yer errand."

Kenny could not have been in better hands, as he readily admitted on the way.

"Ye're a rale chip o' the auld block, Davie, lad; there's nae mainner o' doobt aboot that; an' tak' my word for't, ye'll hae yer reward."

So Davie saw him through the snow-clad streets, and, leaving him at his lodgings, said with cheery briskness,

"There ye are, Kenny, safe an' soun' at yer ain door-cheek, an' here's a saxpence for yer pooch.

"The sky's clearin' a wee, Kenny. Man,

I think ye'll surely hae a better day for yer roun' the morn. I howp sae, onywey. So long."

Thus it was that the old flautist tasted the sweets of the Guidherts' hospitality for the first time, and he never forgot the experience; nay, it was the subject of remark with him at some moment during each succeeding day of his life.

Time and again thereafter, as he crept along by the row of cottages towards our house playing his interminable air, the women-folk, knitting their brows, would remark to him in passing, not without a show of resentment,

"Ye're turnin' awfu' fond o' comin' to Moat Brae, Kenny. What's the meanin' o't?"

His reply was always given with force and conviction.

"Aweel, frien's, I canna see the place, for a'm blin', but lat me tell ye this; gaun to John Guidhert's hoose, it's juist like takin' a trip to heaven!"

While he lived the old man's visits occurred more and more frequently, but he was always received with the utmost kindness and consideration; and it was plain to be seen that he never turned up once too often for either John or Janet.

Chapter XVIII
HIS LAST CALL

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"Janet, there's 'Twittery' comin' up the Brae; I hear him hoastin' [coughing]," exclaimed John, dropping *The Advertiser* and getting to his feet with alacrity.

"I'll slip awa oot to the gairden an' ye maun juist get rid o' him the best wey ye can.

"Tell him a'm aff on a ten-mile walk up the watter side; tell him ye're awfu' deaf the day an' canna hear a word he says; tell him ocht ye like!"

"Mercy me! John, ye wadna hae me stuff the man up wi' a pack o' barefaced lees! It's ower late in the day to start daein' that.

"What ails ye at 'Twittery,' onywey? The body daes a' the talkin', an' while he's at it oor ain tongues they're aye gettin' a reist."

"It's a' verra weel for you, my lass," said John, pausing at the door, "ye hae yer knittin' an' yer darnin' an' siclike, but what's for me to dae a' the time he's batterin' at

me wi' his worrds, worrds, worrds? I can only sit drum-drummin' on the table an' wushin' the auld bletherin' fule was at the deil, Gude forgie me for sayin' sae."

John went out, but, alas! that brief delay with Janet had destroyed his chance of escape, for he had no sooner turned on the doorstep towards the garden gate than a shrill, querulous voice hailed him from the Brae.

"Hi! Whare ye aff, Guidhert? Co' wey in-by, a wee; man, I hae some unco news for ye the day."

There was nothing for it but for John to return to his seat in the kitchen, a tightish place for one of his size, between the table at the window and the corner-cupboard, but handy too, for he was very fond of resting his elbow on the table and drumming thereon, or running his fingers along its smooth edge just as the spirit moved him.

Here he sat grimly enough and commenced his drumming, which, after what he had said to Janet, could be safely taken as an outward sign of inward perturbation.

Having got John fairly cornered and at bay, "Twittery" took up a position calculated to prevent his victim's escape, and at once opened his battery and let drive without mercy; while Janet, noting her good man's

discomfiture and really sympathizing with him, could not refrain from smiling at the gloomy expression on his usually pleasant countenance.

"Weel, freen's, I haena been here for a wee whilie an' there's *lots* o' queer things happenin' in the toon a' the time.

"An' hoo's a' wi' ye, weans?

"I howp ye're in better speerits than I was mysel' a while back on the b'low road yonner. Imphm.

"As I was creepin' roun' by the Brae-fit I stoppit a wee to watch a man soummin' a dug—it was at the verra bit whare ye flung Lecky the Wabster intil the watter, Guidhert."

"Lat that flee stick to the wa', wull ye, 'Twittery,'" said John with a frown.

"He, he! It's touchin' ye up, is't? I thocht ye hedna forgotten thon disgracefu' affair 'at raised sic a stir in the toon.

"Weel, I tell ye, as I was staun'in again' Lecky's hoose oot he comes wi' that black-a-viced face o' his 'at wad spean a foal, an' draws up alangside me, lookin' ower the wa' at the dug.

"'It's fine an' warm this mornin',' says I in a quate, quate vice [voice], for I didna want to get his monkey up.

"It was awfu' ill-adveesed o' me, I ken,

but what cam' oot neist slippit aff my tongue afore I gied a thocht.

" ' The watter'll be a heap warmer the day than it was whan John o' the Moat Brae flung——'

" Save us, that was as far as I gat.

" The deevil gruppit me by the throat an' shook the wind clean oot o' me, his een bleezin' like a wull-cat's, an' says he,

" ' Ye auld rickle-o'-banes, for twa preens I wad bash yer heid an' fling ye intil a deeper bit than this.

" ' Ye can lat yer tongue rin lowse in ony ither pairt o' the toon for what I care, but whan ye come to this Brae-fit ye'll need to keep it atween yer teeth.

" ' Gin ocht o' the kind happens again, here awa I'll send ye hame on the rin, be ye the Auldest Inhabitant ten times ower, an' as fu' o' the rheumatics as a riddle's fu' o' holes.

" ' Hook it oot o' this.'

" Mark me, freens, I'll hae the blackguard wastrel afore the Bailie as sure as my name's Mairshall, an' sae I tell't the man wi' the dug; an' what's mair, he'll be my witness. Imphm.

" I say, fowks, this is no bad wather for the rheumatics. I cam' up the Brae like a racehorse, in a mainner o' speakin', till I gat

to your yett, whan an awfu' twinge took me in the left leg an' I was near doon on the causey.

"But, my certie, as sune as ever I clappit een on the guidman here sneakin' aff to the gairden oot o' sicht an' hearin', I thocht better o't an' keepit my feet like a fell guid ane.

"What was't I was gaun to ax ye, Guidhert? Ou, ay! By the wey, d'ye ken whether Ben Guidwillie's son o' the 'Knocket' hes twa een in's heid or only ane?"

"I ken nocht aboot it," replied John testily, "an' a'm no carin' either.

"My mind's mair exerceesed aboot lang tongues than aboot een or ocht else, enoo, 'Twittery.' Ye tak' me, I howp?" And a sudden fierceness crept into the serious expression on John's face.

"Twittery" straightened himself and looked across at John with a decided air of wonderment. An exhibition of irascibility at Moat Brae was something new in his experience.

"Guidhert," said he, "ye're unco short, no to say snappy, the day. What ails ye ava?

"Ye'll be needin' pheesic, nae doot.

"Janet, woman, ye'll hae to gie him a guid strang dose o' Ep. salts the nicht afore he gangs till his bed, an' mark me, he'll rise the

morn's mornin' blythe an' brisk as a laverock, an' ye'll see him rinnin' aboot the toon like a twa-year-auld."

Janet was amused ; John wasn't.

" Noo ye've put me oot," continued " Twittery," " an' I've lost the thread o' my story. Whare was I ? Ou, ay !

" Whan I was on the street last Market-day a callant I took to be a son o' Ben Guidwillie's staps up an' says he,

" ' Guid day, Maister Mairshall. Hae ye seen onything o' the Recruiting Sergeant ? '

" ' The Recruiting Sergeant,' says I. ' No, I haena seen him an' I've no' been lookin' for him, for my fechtin' days they're a' ower an' dune wi'.'

" ' But,' says I, ' what in the warl's the like o' you wantin' wi' the R.S. ? '

" ' Ou,' says he, ' I cast oot [quarrelled] wi' my faither yestreen an' a'm gaun to jine the Airmy.'

" ' *You* jine the Airmy,' says I, an' I gied a bit lauch. ' *You* jine the Airmy an' wantin' an e'e ? ' "

" What's that ye say," put in John in a surprised tone, " only ae e'e ? "

" Ay, ae e'e," replied " Twittery."

" Ho ! ho ! ho ! " laughed John sarcastically. " What guid was the fallow wi' an e'e oot ? "

"Wait a wee, wait a wee," piped 'Twittery,' "that's whare the joke comes in. As I was sayin' "—here he hesitated, puckered his brows and took his chin between a finger and thumb.

"Ou, ay! Says I to the chiel, 'They wadna hae the like o' you in the Airmy wi' an e'e oot.'

"'What for no,' says he, 'whan a sodger shoots disna he steek [shut] ae e'e? I'll be aye ready for action, onywey.'

"He, he, he! Man, Guidhert, I couldna win aff the bit for I kenna hoo lang I was that wake wi' lauchin'.

"An' what think ye? I met the puir chap gaun hame later in the efternune greetin' like a wean.

"He'd seen the R.S."

"'Twittery,' listen to me; a'm gaun to lend ye hauf-a-croun," said John in a tone of voice with an angry growl in it which seemed to portend a coming storm.

"Ye're what? A'm needin' nane o' yer hauf-crouns. Man, I could pave yer kitchen-flair wi' hauf-crouns o' my ain gin I wantit."

"Ou, but I wad like to lend ye hauf-a-croun an' ye maunna say me nay."

"The man's awa wi't; Janet, woman, what think ye?"

"Ou weel——" said she, and paused,

apparently too much bewildered to proceed.

"Say nae mair aboot yer hauf-crouns, Guidhert, or ye'll hae me rinnin' oot the hoose afore I've gien ye hauf my news, an' that'll vex ye, I warrant."

A sound of lamentation, a low muttering, strongly suggestive of a violent imprecation, smothered at its birth, floated to my astonished ears from the direction of the corner cupboard.

Janet heard it, too, and the start she gave dislocated her knitting-needles.

Looking up from her work she glanced at John over the rims of her glasses, and catching his eye shook her head at him with incredulity and sorrow plainly written on her serious face.

John simply glared all the more fiercely and shook his fist at "Twittery," who with his head in his breast seemed to have arrived at that point where it was necessary to rally his mental forces before making another assault.

"Man, Guidhert," said he at length, "it's a queer thing an' I hardly ken hoo to accoont for't, but I canna help conneckin' ye in my mind wi' a leein', guid-for-naethin' scoonrel I aince did a bit o' business wi' at—nae maitter whare.

"The raskill's name was Drinkwatter (he

wasna a Scotchman), an' he was brocht up at a far awa bit south the Equawtor. I canna juist reel aff the name o' the place, but the wey Drinkwatter pronounced it, it soonded mair like a sab an' a sigh, a sneeze and a hiccup, mixed a' thegither, than ocht else I can think o'.

" Whan he grew up his folk made him a tiler [tailor], an' he followed his tredd as apprentice an' journeyman, for years amang the natives.

" Af coorse, we hedna been talkin' lang afore he introduced the little-heard-o' but awfu' fascinatin' subjec' o' Dress in the South Seas.

" But for leein' ! Och ! He wanted to tell me (serious he was too as ever I saw a man in my life)—I say he actually wanted to tell me——"

" ' Twittery,' ye doited auld deevil, stap yer havers an' lat me oot o' this. My patience is fair exhausted an' I can thole yer jawin' nae langer. A'm determined to lend ye five shillings, an' gin ye say muckle mair I'll lend ye a pound note !

" Lat me oot o' this an' I'll get the siller."

At this point Janet, who had been gradually introducing a greater degree of fierceness into her knitting, as though her feelings were escaping at the ends of her needles, leaned over towards my chair and whispered,

"Tammas, Tammas, what in the warl's come ower the guidman? He's surely gane clean gyte [crazy] wantin' to fling his siller aboot this gate."

"Twittery" still took the matter unconcernedly and kept his seat without flinching, although it was plainly apparent that John's temper was gradually getting the better of him.

"Aweel, a wilfu' man maun hae his wey. Ay, an' it's juist as true 'at a fule an' his money's sune pairted," said "Twittery" with a sigh.

"But lat me tell ye, Guidhert, ye'll no win awa frae that lum-cheek till ye've haen a piece o' my mind. Ay, an' ye'll mebbe be baith sick an' sorry afore I've dune wi' ye."

At this John sprang to his feet determinedly, and bringing his fist down on the table with a mighty bang he roared out,

"Ye auld pagan eemage, torment me nae langer, or by the leevin' Jingo! I'll—I'll——"

Never before had language of such terrible force and gravity found its way into John's vocabulary.

Janet had now risen, alarm and displeasure clearly depicted upon her countenance, and leaning across the table she proceeded to admonish her enraged spouse in wailing accents.

" John, John, that awfu' temper o' yours'll dae for ye yet——

" Weel may ye think shame o' yersel this day——

" Ye're waur than ony teegar in a cage, an' muckle wull ye hae to answer for."

John deprecated his wife's interference by a wave of the hand sideways and continued to glare fiercely at poor " Twittery," who, sitting speechless with astonishment, suddenly developed a sort of palsy, his head beginning to wag backwards and forwards much like the Chinese Mandarin's we used to see occasionally in the Tea Dealers' windows long ago.

As it was now plainly evident to " Twittery " that the game was up, he only delayed long enough to recover somewhat from the shock he had sustained before pushing back his chair and preparing to leave the cottage.

John, with his newly acquired elbow room, at once took measures to carry out his original intention of negotiating a loan with " Twittery," and opening the cupboard door he took two half-crowns from a wooden bowl on the second shelf and threw them down on the table with a clatter, remarking in a stern voice,

" There's yer siller, tak' it up an' flit."

Janet could only clasp her hands in amazement and ejaculate faintly,

"The like o' that for fair evendoon daftness!"

"Ay, mistress, ye may weel say that word," quoth 'Twittery,' and rising to his feet with difficulty he picked up the coins with a trembling hand and dropped them into his waistcoat pocket.

"I'll bid ye guid-day, freens," he continued, moving across the floor,

"Ye'll see me again—whan I come back."

On reaching the door he turned and said with a sneer,

"Janet, woman, for ony sake dinna forget that dose o' pheesic, for, my certie, it's sairly needed in this hoose, an' dearly wad I like to hae the mixin' o't!"

John shuffled his feet on the floor and gave vent to the mystic word, "Shoo!" with such vehemence as to suggest a sudden escape of steam followed by an explosion—a startling display which seemed to have the effect of jerking the patriarch off the doorstep, and he was gone.

Janet was now muttering, ay, grumbling a little. Said she,

"To think 'at ye could fling awa yer siller that gate, John, an' it wantit sae badly for—things 'at's needit."

" I dinna care gin it was wantit to keep the Minister in the Manse or the mice oot o' the Kirk," he retorted. " I say it was weel wared sae lang's it keeps ' Twittery ' frae pokin' his nose in at oor hoose door again," and the sorely tried man, who was by this time in a great heat, strode off to the garden to cool down.

When he returned he was in calmer mood, and proceeded to give a much needed explanation of his inexplicable, and as Janet thought, totally uncalled for, generosity.

" I was speakin' till a man in the toon aboot ' Twittery,' " said he, " an' I tell't him hoo tiresome he'd gotten, ca'in in on us every twa-three days, an' deavin' us wi' his fuilish clatterin'.

" ' Ou, that's a sma maitter,' says the man. ' A' ye've got to dae wi' ' Twittery ' is to lend him siller, an' ye'll no see him again for a towmond [twelvemonth] on en'.

" ' In fac', the mair ye lend him the langer he'll bide awa.' "

Janet did not speak, but she was stirring the porridge at the moment, and it seemed to me that she suddenly introduced a good deal more energy into the task than was actually called for, making the porridge stick " fair dirl."

I concluded that her mind was still occupied

with " Twittery's " weighty aphorism anent a fool and his money.

Let it be placed on record, however, that John's informant proved a true prophet, for Timothy Marshall was never again seen at Moat Brae.

Chapter XIX
THE DAMBROD

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THE DAMBROD

Left undisturbed at his own fireside, John Guidhert often showed great taciturnity, and I have known him to remain for a couple of hours at a stretch without uttering a single word.

There were moments as he sat upright, mute and motionless in his narrow corner, with the firelight playing about him just before the lamp was lighted, when my school-acquired knowledge of ancient days stirred in my mind, and, not a little awestruck, I likened him to some carved image at the door of Egyptian tomb or temple ; and the last thing likely to occur to one at such a time was that he should be capable of enthusiasm on any subject under the sun.

Yet for all his taciturnity and apparent want of interest in mundane affairs there was one indoor occupation, humdrum enough in itself and only mildly exciting, that he dearly loved to engage in, and during the

progress of which all his energies were aroused and his mental perceptions brought into full play, and that was the ancient game of Draughts, in Scotland called The Dambrod.

" Ye're awfu' quate the nicht, Guidman ; a penny for yer thochts," Janet would say at times, looking up from her needle when John's prolonged silence began to be felt, as it were.

" I hae nane, lass ; my mind's aff duty," John might reply, and relapse into silence again.

But this was " in the gloaming," before the lamp was lighted.

See him as soon as Janet has set out and trimmed that magical disperser of gloomy shadows, and the Draught-board, with its fascinating squares, is revealed to his gaze hanging on the opposite wall.

How promptly he rises, and advancing to the centre table invites me with sparkling eyes to try my hand once more !

He always approached the pleasing occupation with an avowal of pride in his own skill, and a smile of assurance on his face.

It was as though he could have said to me,

" Ay, Tammas lad, ye hae yer schule-buiks an' yer schule sports, an' I canna bate ye there or come ony whare near't ; but whan it comes to The Dambrod, whare are ye ? "

For long we played almost nightly, always with the same result—an unfailing succession of wins for John.

I think he was impressed by the plucky way in which I bore defeat after defeat over so long a period, for he thought well, from time to time, to condole with me in a gentle voice, advising me to keep my heart up, for that it was a long lane that had no turning, and I was only young yet.

" Ye'll mebbe bate me some day, Tammas, for there's nae denyin' 'at ye're gae quick in the uptak."

This went on until the fateful night when disaster suddenly overtook him.

Passing down the High Street with time on my hands, I paused at a stationer's window, and there, behold ! staring me in the face was the very thing I wanted—a " Handbook on Draughts," price 6d.

I went in and bought the book, carried it home, and studied it carefully. Very soon, on finding that I was profiting greatly from the rules laid down in the little volume, I hinted to John one evening during play that it might perhaps be a good thing if he were to apply himself to the Handbook for his own benefit.

" Na, na, Tammas," said he, " I need nane o' yer Handbuiks, for they can tell me nocht

aboot this business I dinna ken a'ready.

" I min' ae time I was playin' wi' a chap 'at fancied himsel' a lot, an' cracked up his buik-larnin' mair than I likit, an' juist as he was boastin' at the loudest, I——"

At that moment I moved a man, which John took innocently enough, whereupon I immediately relieved him of three of his, and he found his remaining three boxed up in the single corner like sheep in a pen.

This unlooked for happening effectually cut short his anecdotal reminiscences.

He turned very red and glared at the board, but I was hopeful that no untoward result would follow, when unfortunately he chanced to glance at Janet, who was smiling broadly to herself.

The sight fairly roused him, and he went for me for all he was worth, actually accusing me of cheating !

" Tammas, I wad never hae thocht it o' ye. I couldna hae believed 'at ye wad cheat an' me daein' a' in my pooer to gar ye play richt. Lat me tell ye this. A man 'at can cheat suld never touch the Dambrod."

Well ! What could I, a lad of fifteen, do to successfully counter an unjust charge such as that, made by a man old enough to be my grandfather ? Absolutely nothing. I just looked at Janet out of the corner of my eye,

and then, lowering my glance to the board, remained mute.

John pushed back his chair with a rattle and stamped off to the garden, where he paced backwards and forwards until his anger had abated somewhat, when he returned, locked the door, and remarked that "he doobted the wather wadna haud, an' we micht look for a change or mornin'."

The morning brought a change in his temper, too, and I found him bright and cheery at the breakfast table.

But for days afterwards he studiously avoided all mention of Draughts, and I began to think that his interest in the game had evaporated. I was woefully mistaken.

Coming home before my usual time one rainy evening shortly after this and entering the kitchen unexpectedly, I was surprised to see a sudden strange upheaval of John's right shoulder, and a hammer-like movement of his arm as he brought it down on the table.

From that moment until I left the kitchen for bed he maintained his rigid attitude, immovable as the Sphinx.

When the time came for the evening chapter, Janet reached the Bible down from the chest-of-drawers, but on placing it beside him, John said,

"Tammas, ye're a graun' reader efter a' yer practice at the schule.

"I'll thank ye to tak' an' read for me the nicht, for my throat's in nane o' the best trim for't. A touch o' the cauld's gotten intil't, a'm thinkin'."

Here he gave a lame sort of a cough.

As soon as I had finished,

"That's fine," said he. "Ye'll wag yer pow in a poo'pit yet. Noo, Tammas, my man, ye can say 'Guid-nicht' as sune's ye like, for a'm aboot ready for my bed."

On entering my room, I noticed that the "Handbook on Draughts" was missing from its place on the bookshelf, and I smiled, devining in that moment that John was consulting it surreptitiously and had probably forgotten to replace it.

Next day, on coming in at noon, I enquired of Janet as to the progress of John's throat trouble.

"Hoots, Tammas!" cried she, with a ringing laugh, "there's nocht wrang wi' his throat or his tongue either.

"Yestreen he was readin' your buik aboot the Dambrod, an' whan ye cam' in he slippit it aneath his elbow, an' he daurna move for fear o' ye seein't.

"Silly man! I dinna haud wi' sic closeness.

"But, Tammas, ye'll mind an' no lat on 'at I tell't ye, or I'll never hear the last o't."

So ho! That was how the wind blew. However, for all his manœuvring, he never regained his lost supremacy. In point of fact, the one outstanding feature of his secret dips into my little vade-mecum was, that the more he consulted it the worse he played.

From which I arrived at the conclusion that his well-thought-out and long-established tactics, clashing with the new ideas he had picked up, simply created confusion of mind and led to his undoing.

I think I ought to add that, agreeing to sink all differences and let bygones be bygones, we played our last game a day or two before I said good-bye to Moat Brae, and I deliberately allowed him to win, and win handsomely.

As he hung up the Draught-board I had the benefit of his final word on the matter, delivered in a decidedly exultant tone:

"Noo, my hearty, what hae ye to say to *that*?

"But dinna be doon-hearted, Tammas. Rome wasna built in a day."

Chapter XX
A SERIOUS LAPSE

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A SERIOUS LAPSE

The complexity of human nature is proverbial the world over, and it is a melancholy fact that traces of its baser qualities will appear at times even in the finest characters.

With sorrow be it made known that the day came when that paragon of excellence, Davie the dutiful, for what reason conjecture at the time quite failed to determine, administered a dreadful shock to his parents, and caused them, simple-minded and confiding as they were, untold pain and anxiety by a complete cessation of his nightly visits to Moat Brae.

The sudden defection of a Cabinet Minister at a time of crisis could not have created much greater commotion than was apparent in our humble domicile. Even Tibbie, the cat, was affected.

Davie's usual time for putting in an appearance was long past one evening, and

Janet grew manifestly more and more restless as she sat at her knitting.

"Mercy me!" she exclaimed at last. "What in the warl's keepin' the laddie?"

"Ou," said John, evidently unconcerned at this early stage, "he'll hae missed the road I shouldna wonner.

"We'll hae to send the bell-man roun' cryin' a lost wean."

"Ay, it's a' verra weel for you to mak' licht o't, but a'm rale oneasy for somethin' by-ordinar maun hae happened to keep him awa this gate.

"Look at the clock."

The night passed, but no Davie turned up.

Another night, and another, followed with the same result, when I was able to give some little information, which, while it showed Davie to be still moving about as active as ever, only served to deepen the mystery of his non-appearance on our doorstep.

I explained that on going down the Brae on the previous evening, I had encountered Davie coming up, when it struck me he was about to resume his discontinued visits.

"Ye say sae!" exclaimed John. "An' what said he?"

"Oh, he just looked at me and said, 'Hello, Tammas! So long!'

"I felt greatly surprised," I continued

'and stopped and watched him until he passed out of sight as he turned to the left at the Moat House entrance-gates, heading for the North Road.

"He was carrying a carpet bag."

"Gude save us! He'll be aff to the Hielan's," wailed Janet.

"Ou dear, ou dear, my puir laddie; he'll be aff to the Hielan's as sure as fate."

It had been a standing threat of Davie's for years past whenever things went contrariwise with him that he would "clear oot an' gang to the Hielan's," and his mother never heard it without trembling.

"Weel, weel, the like o' that," said John gravely.

"Hoo did ye no tell us yestreen, Tammas?"

"Well, perhaps I should have done so, but the truth is that I was afraid of upsetting you, knowing your concern owing to his not calling. I'm sorry now."

John was standing at the gable window, in a thoughtful mood, looking out onto the Brae, when he suddenly exclaimed,

"Mercy! there's Davie awa by!"

"No!" cried Janet with a start.

"Yea, yea, it's him; Tammas, rin oot an' see.

"Save's, the look he gied me as he passed the winda!"

I rushed out hatless and was on the Brae in less than five seconds after John had spoken, but there was no Davie to be seen.

He couldn't have reached the turn of the road at the Moat House gates, which was fifty yards distant, neither could he have scaled the boundary-wall on the opposite side of the Brae, for it was ten feet high ; so that there remained only two hypotheses.

Either he had made a lightning dart into the first of the row of cottages beyond our house, or otherwise there had occurred a serious aberration in John's vision, and no one at all had passed.

No sooner, however, had Janet put forward this last-named suggestion than John turned round sharply on the hearth-rug to set her right, but stepping on Tibbie's outstretched tail with all the weight of his six-foot-one, that tortured and infuriated animal emitted a fiendish yell, which completely drowned John's vigorous protest at Janet's unreasonable supposition.

On the fifth day of Davie's absence, about seven in the evening, as I was helping John on with his overcoat after he had decided to go down to Davie's home-quarter to pick up news of him, the truant stepped briskly in without any preliminary nonsense, and taking off his hat (a most unusual proceeding) seated

himself at the fireside and carefully deposited his carpet bag beside his chair.

"Gude preserve us!" exclaimed Janet. "Wherever hae ye been a' this time, Davie?

"Ye've surely gane gyte [crazy] to treat us this gate. Laddie, I wonner at ye."

"Weel, mither," replied Davie, looking down sheepishly at his hat as he twirled it in his hands, "the fac' is I've some awfu' news for ye an' I juist couldna face ye suner."

"Awfu' news, say ye?" queried Janet, with a concerned look.

"We've heard tell o' ye stravaigin' [wandering aimlessly] aboot the toon a lot, you an' yer carpet bag; I saw ye pass the winda yestreen wi' my ain een," said John, who had taken on a serious air and did not seem too well pleased.

"Davie, d'ye mean to tell me there was ocht to hinner ye to stap in at yer ain door?

"It's michty queer to my wey o' thinkin'."

"It's true eneuch, faither," returned Davie. "I gat this length wi' the idea o' comin' in, but my hert failed me at the yett an' I gaed by; an' whan I saw ye lookin' at me oot the wee winda, I made a dash for't intil the fowk's hoose neist door an' nearly fleyt the life oot o' them.

"I made oot 'at I was seekin' orders for waddin'-suits in my spare time. That was a

lee, but it was as near the truth as I could get on the spur o' the moment, for I hed a waddin'-suit in my bag richt eneuch.

" Ay, my ain waddin'-suit, an' it was *you* I wantit to shew't to.

" What's the use o' beatin' aboot the buss ? " he continued, gathering courage.

" I may as weel tell ye sune as syne 'at a'm gaun to get mairrit ! "

" Ye're what ? " shouted Janet, looking wildly across at him.

" Ye're never thinkin' o' ocht o' that sort a laddie like you ! Davie, ye're surely daft."

" Why, mither, what age was you and my faither whan you was mairrit ?

" I've heard ye say 'at he was nineteen an' you auchteen. Auchteen an' nineteen, that's thretty-seeven ; the twa o' ye thegither nae aulder than a'm mysel enoo.

" Come, mither, ye'll no haud on that tack surely.

" Onywey, though I dinna want to vex ye, it's either mairrage or the Hielan's for me ! "

Janet was dumb.

" Ay, Davie," began his father, " an' sae ye're thinkin' o' gettin' mairrit, are ye ?

" An' whare ye to get yer wife ? "

" Ou," returned Davie, " I hae the lass fixed a' richt. She's cuik at a doctor's ; ay, an' a rale guid cuik too. I ken ! "

John puckered his lips for a whistle and a roguish twinkle came into his eye, but these signs of surprised appreciation instantly disappeared when he looked at Janet.

Her face was a picture of woe.

"Ay, man, ye'll hae to seek the lass up the Brae some time or ither an' lat's hae a look at her," hinted John, for the sake of saying something.

"Ou, I can hae her here in a tick o' the clock gin ye'll say the word."

This was not exactly what John had expected, and his face took on a somewhat perturbed expression.

"Hoo?" he remarked. "Daes she bide here awa?"

"Na," said Davie, "but I hae her staunin' oot-by there at the yett. I'll seek her in as ye're sae anxious to see her."

"What's her name?" asked his father, as Davie was moving to the door.

"Maggie Ann," replied Davie.

"That's no what I mean. We ken lot's o' Maggie Anns.

"What's her ither name—her sirname?"

"Losh, I dinna mind't. She tell't me too, but it's sic a moothfu' I canna keep't on my tongue. I'll ax her whan I seek her in."

He went out and returned in five minutes (occupied, no doubt, in combating natural

feminine bashfulness), bringing in a bright-eyed, ruddy-cheeked and pleasant-looking woman of twenty-five or so, very neatly dressed, and just the thing one would conclude for a steady-going, whole-hearted chap like Davie.

"This is her!" said he.

"Stap forrit an' shake haun's wi' my faither an' mither, lassie; dinna be blate [bashful].

"Maggie Ann, what's yer sirname again?"

"Marjoribanks," said Maggie Ann, with a blush that became her immensely.

"There ye are!" cried Davie exultantly. "Maggie Ann Marjoribanks. There's a name for ye! Noo are ye setisfeed?"

Janet looked Maggie Ann up and down with a very critical eye, and her face gradually cleared.

Davie confided to me afterwards that he had stayed away from home in furtherance of his own matrimonial plans, for, said he, "I thocht the auld fowk wad be sae pleased to see me back 'at they wad loup at the lass too!"

And he was right.

Chapter XXI
DAVIE AT HIS BEST

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Although really outside the scope of the present narrative to follow Davie into the maze of his matrimonial experiences, it were perhaps a pity to ring down the curtain on our little drama of humble life without mentioning that on Davie's wedding-day (which came round within three months of his spirited introduction of "the lass" to his bewildered parents) his brother, William, gave signal proof of his large-heartedness and fraternal regard by announcing that, in view of Davie's changed condition, he (William) had purchased, for his especial benefit, a flourishing blacksmith's business at a country place within easy reach of Dinnan, and which would be ready for occupancy in the near future.

Thus was Davie's cup of happiness filled to overflowing on that auspicious occasion.

As soon as he was fairly settled in his new quarters, I went up to see him and found

him hard at work with his two assistants—a journeyman and an apprentice—to all appearance happy and contented, and evidently not a little proud of his newly-acquired position as a master tradesman.

Releasing the bellows-handle and drawing the back of his hand across his perspiring brow, he came forward with a cheery smile of welcome.

"It's yersel, Tammas!

"Man, a'm awfu' pleased to see ye. Stap doon to the hoose an' speak to Maggie Ann."

As we walked to his neat and commodious cottage, crossing on our way by means of stepping stones a broad trout stream, clear as crystal, that ran at the foot of his garden in its course from the not distant hills, Davie said to me,

"This is a bonnie bit, Tammas, an' ye ken wha I hae to thank for't.

"It's mebbe wrang to boast ower muckle aboot ane's ain kith an' kin, but, I tell ye lad, oor Will'um's a man an' a brither to the core, an' gin he hed his wey o't, he wad hae a'body sittin' crouse an' cosie ilka ane in his ain bield [shelter], an' happy's the day's lang."

Maggie Ann was above stairs when we entered, and Davie called up to her,

"Mistress, doon ye come quick an' fetch

oot the best ye hae in the hoose. Here's Tammas to see ye ! "

And as I basked in their warm-hearted hospitality I realized readily enough that Mistress Guidhert had Davie and all appertaining to him regulated to a nicety.

He confided to me in an impressive undertone during her temporary absence from the table his own estimate of her worth and capabilities.

" Man, Tammas," said he, " that woman's as near perfection as mak's nae maitter, an' it's easy seen 'at she hes a'thing up to the nines."

Yes, as Davie's cherished wife, she of the imposing name revealed the finest qualities of a true womanly nature ; and it is pleasing to record that from the day of her marriage her benign influence extended itself in full measure to Moat Brae, where she became greatly beloved and proved a real comfort and a blessing to both John and Janet.

THE END.